The New Criterion

October 2002

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

Notes & Comments, 1
Geertz's ethnocentrism *by Keith Windschuttle*, 5
Undressing the Victorians *by Roger Kimball*, 13
Albert Speer: the good Nazi? *by David Pryce-Jones*, 18
Victor Hugo at two hundred *by Eric Ormsby*, 23
Bookshops in Dubai & Havana *by Anthony Daniels*, 29
Poems *by Elizabeth Spires & Richard Tillinghast*, 34

Theater: Good enough for Shakespeare? *by Mark Steyn*, 39; **Art:** "Don't draw the bug!" *by Martin Greenberg*, 44; Gallery chronicle *by Daniel Kunitz*, 48; **Music** *by Jay Nordlinger & Patrick J. Smith*, 51; **The media** *by James Bowman*, 57
Books: *Raymond Aron* The Dawn of Universal History *reviewed by Daniel J. Mahoney*, 62; *Federico García Lorca* Collected Poems *reviewed by Alexander Coleman*, 65; *Edmund Sears Morgan* Benjamin Franklin *reviewed by Marc Arkin*, 67; *Marcel Reich-Ranicki* The Author of Himself *reviewed by Tess Lewis*, 70; *Isabelle Frank, ed.* The Theory of Decorative Art *reviewed by Francis Morrone*, 73
Notebook: The apotheosis of Stephen Jay Gould *by Paul R. Gross*, 77

Volume 21, Number 2, $7.75

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lennart Anderson

Paintings

CATALOGUE AVAILABLE

Arthur Carter

Sculpture

CATALOGUE AVAILABLE

October 1 – 26

Salander-O'Reilly Galleries

20 East 79 Street New York 10021 Tel (212) 879-6606

Monday–Saturday 9:30 to 5:30

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Markus Lüpertz

Semiramis

September 12 – November 16, 2002

Catalogue with essay by David Cohen

James Castle

Structures

November 21, 2002 – January 18, 2003

Catalogue with introduction by Frank Del Deo

Knoedler & Company

– Established 1846 –

19 East 70 Street New York New York 10021

Tel 212 794-0550 Fax 212 772-6932

www.knoedlergallery.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ANDANTE

everything classica

"The **gold standard** among classical music websites"

- The New York Times

andante invites you to enjoy a one month **FREE** trial membership

Just go to
www.andante.com/newcriterion.cfm
and enter promotional code
NEWCRITERION to explore **andante.com**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The New Criterion *October 2002*

Editor & Publisher *Hilton Kramer*
Managing Editor *Roger Kimball*
Poetry Editor *Robert Richman*
Associate Editor *James Panero*
Assistant to the Editors *Sara E. Lussier*
Technical Associate *Max Watman*

Publisher 1982–1994 *Samuel Lipman*

Contributors to this issue

Marc Arkin is a professor of law at Fordham University.

James Bowman is the American editor of the London *Times Literary Supplement*.

Alexander Coleman is the editor of the Viking Penguin bilingual edition of the *Selected Poems* by Jorge Luis Borges.

Anthony Daniels is a doctor and writer whose most recent books are *Utopias Elsewhere* and *Monrovia Mon Amour*.

Martin Greenberg's translation of Goethe's *Faust* is available from Yale University Press.

Paul R. Gross is University Professor of Life Sciences, emeritus, at the University of Virginia.

Daniel Kunitz writes about art regularly for *The New Criterion*.

Tess Lewis is a translator and essayist who writes frequently about European literature.

Daniel J. Mahoney's most recent book is *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: The Ascent from Ideology* (Rowman & Littlefield).

Francis Morrone's *Architectural Guidebook to New York City* is available from Gibbs Smith.

Jay Nordlinger is the managing editor and music critic of *National Review*.

Eric Ormsby's most recent book is *Facsimiles of Time: Essays on Poetry and Translation* (The Porcupine's Quill).

David Pryce-Jones is a senior editor of *National Review*.

Patrick J. Smith is a former editor of *Opera News*.

Elizabeth Spires's new collection of poetry, *Now the Green Blade Rises*, was published in September by W. W. Norton.

Mark Steyn is the senior North American correspondent for Britain's Telegraph Group.

Richard Tillinghast's latest book of poetry is *Six Mile Mountain* (Story Line Press).

Keith Windschuttle's *Fabrication of Aboriginal History, Volume One, Van Diemen's Land 1803–1847*, will be published by Macleay Press, Sydney, in November.

Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019, a nonprofit public foundation as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public. ISSN 0734-0222. October 2002, Volume 21, Number 2. Subscriptions: $48 for one year, $88 for two. For Canada and Mexico, add $7 per year. Outside North America, add $14 per year. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster and subscribers: send change of address, all remittances, and subscription inquiries to The New Criterion, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834. Copyright © 2002 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc. Newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., One Media Way, 12406 Rt. 250, Milan, OH 44846. (800) 221-3148. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. All correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (212) 247-6980. Notice of nonreceipt must be sent to the Office Manager within three months of the issue date. **Internet: http://www.newcriterion.com Email: letters@newcriterion.com**

Advertising: Fred Stern, 44 Paulin Boulevard, Leonia, NJ 07605. (201) 947-2674.
Subscriptions: To subscribe, renew, or report a problem please call (800) 783-4903.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman. It is set in 10-point Galliard and is printed by Science Press in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, USA.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Roy Lichtenstein

Times Square Mural

September 5 - October 19

catalogue available with essay by Scott Rothkopf and short story by Rick Moody

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

1018 MADISON AVENUE NEW YORK 10021 TEL 212 744 7400 WWW.MIANDN.COM

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notes & Comments: October 2002

Campus "diversity"

What quality above all others do college administrations and teachers strive to nurture on campus these days? Intellectual rigor? Not likely. That presupposes maintaining high standards, and, as we have been repeatedly told, high standards are invidious. Houston Baker, a former president of the Modern Language Association, spoke for many in his profession when he said that choosing between Shakespeare and Jacqueline Susann (for instance) is "no different from choosing between a hoagy and a pizza." Professor Baker added, "I am one whose career is dedicated to the day when we have a disappearance of those standards." Michael Harris, a professor of religious studies at the University of Tennessee, put it this way: "when you see the word 'qualifications' used, remember that this is the new code word for whites."

If not intellectual rigor, then what? How about the patient habit of disinterested inquiry? You know, the effort to appreciate works of literature for their intrinsic value, not their political appeal, to judge arguments on the basis of their merits, not their ideological provenance? Again, not likely. The literary theorist Stanley Fish summed up the reigning attitude about such matters when he declared that "there is no such thing as intrinsic merit." The philosopher Richard Rorty concurred: "I do not," he has written, "have much use for notions like 'objective value' and 'objective truth.'" It's a common attitude, susceptible to many variations. Hence the radical feminist law professor Catharine MacKinnon who endorses feminism's "critique of the objective standpoint" or "science" as "a specifically male approach to knowledge."

No, it is not intellectual rigor or the habit of scholarly disinterestedness or a commitment to objective truth that is inculcated most fiercely in the academy today. The mantra, the watchword on today's campuses is *diversity*—or, to put it more accurately, "diversity." The scare quotes are necessary. Why? Because diversity means "variety," and while there is a lot of talk about variety, difference, and diversity on campuses, what is actually encouraged is strict conformity on all contentious issues.

Over the years, we have often had occasion to report on this phenomenon: the case of campus A, which champions "diversity" but looks the other way when a conservative student newspaper is confiscated and destroyed; or campus B, where the women's studies program refuses to welcome women who are pro-life; or campus C, where administrators and many prominent faculty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

members mount a campaign to prevent the establishment of a local chapter of the National Association of Scholars, a tradition-minded group of teachers whose motto is "For Reasoned Scholarship in a Free Society."

Of course, these examples are anecdotal. Is that a deficiency? Not really. How could such examples be anything but anecdotal? Yet whenever we present such evidence, we often encounter the objection that they are "*merely* anecdotal," i.e., that they are exceptions, unrepresentative cases adduced to "prove a (tendentious) point."

Our own feeling is that if something looks like a rat, walks like a rat, and acts like a rat, then there are good grounds for believing that it is, in fact, a rat. In other words, an accumulation of "anecdotal evidence" can tell us a lot. Nevertheless, it is always reassuring to have some hard data to offer the sceptics. And on the issue of diversity—that is, "diversity"—on campus, the September number of *American Enterprise* magazine has provided us with an revealing picture of the political diversity of college faculties. Entitled "The Shame of America's One-Party Campuses," the article notes that "in most sectors of American life . . . you will find ample numbers of both conservatives and liberals." The great exception is in American colleges and universities, "where the Left/Right balance is grossly skewed." It almost goes without saying that the skewing is firmly in the direction of the Left:

> Today's colleges and universities are *not*, to use the current buzzword, "diverse" places. Quite the opposite: they are virtual one-party states, ideological monopolies, badly unbalanced ecosystems. . . . They do not, when it comes to political and cultural ideas, look like America.

To support this claim, *American Enterprise* (with some help from the California-based Center for the Study of Popular Culture) visited local Boards of Elections in the neighborhoods of more than twenty major colleges and university. They then cross-referenced public voter-registration records with faculty rosters for several major departments. Results for some Women's Studies programs and departments are reported, but otherwise the survey stayed away from pseudo-disciplines and concentrated on mainstream departments such as anthropology, economics, engineering, English, history, political science, psychology, and sociology. Those faculty members who were registered as Republicans or Libertarians were coded as members of the Right. Those who registered themselves in the Democratic, Green, or Working Families Party, were designated as members of the Left. (Some faculty members were not registered at all, or were registered in a party that could not be classed ideologically.)

The results of this survey are hardly surprising. But they are, we think, instructive. At Brown University, for example, there are five professors of economics registered in a party of the Left, but only one in a party of the right. In engineering, it's seven on the Left and two on the right. How's that for "diversity"? At Brown, anyway, it's pretty good, because in English it is ten on the Left and zero on the Right. How about history? There it is seventeen on the Left and . . . zero on the Right. Political science? Seven to zero. Sociology? Eight to zero.

Of course, Brown is well-known as a left-leaning institution. Consider, as an alternative, the State University of New York. There we find fifteen faculty members in sociology registered in a part of the Left and . . . zero in a party of the Right. Fortunately, things are more balanced in political science, where the ratio is only twenty to one. At the University of Colorado at Boulder, it's thirty-seven to zero in English. Twenty-eight to one in history, fourteen to zero in journalism, seventeen to two in political science, etc., etc. The pattern is the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same at Harvard, at Davidson College, at Penn State University; it is the same at the University of California at Berkeley, at Syracuse University, at Pomona College, and the University of Maryland. Ditto at Stanford, UCLA, and the University of California at Santa Barbara. At Williams College, out of a faculty of more than 200, only four are registered Republicans. The *American Enterprise* survey also reports on a poll of 151 Ivy League professors conducted by Frank Luntz Research in 2001. Three percent of those surveyed identified themselves as Republican (none identified himself as "conservative"; 6 percent checked "somewhat conservative"). As for voting, the Luntz survey reported that 84 percent of Ivy League professors voted for Al Gore, 6 percent for Ralph Nader, and 9 percent for George W. Bush. The electorate at large was split about evenly between the major candidates, with 48 percent each for Gore and Bush.

What do these surveys tell us? For one thing, as *American Enterprise* notes, they tell us that although "colleges like to characterize themselves as wide-open places . . . where all ideals and principles may be pursued freely," in reality "you will find a much wider—and freer—cross-section of human reasoning and conviction in the aisles of any grocery store or city bus." But there is more. It is not simply that our colleges and universities have institutionalized a sort of Orwellian parody of diversity. There is also the issue of educational responsibility. That is to say, the rejection of conservatism on campus is not only a political gesture—though it is certainly that. It is also an intellectual rebellion and, we would argue, a violation of pedagogical trust. The political philosopher Hannah Arendt was certainly no conservative when it came to politics. But she understood that any education worthy of the name had to be conservative. "Conservatism," she wrote in 1958, "in the *sense of conservation*, is of the essence of the educational activity, whose task is always to cherish and protect something." Today, many—perhaps most—of those who are entrusted by society with cherishing and protecting our cultural heritage are in fact the despoilers of that heritage.

The wildly skewed political complexion of college faculties is grounds for concern. Among other things, it shows what a travesty the touted ideal of diversity is on many campuses. But there is more at stake than a spurious ideal of diversity. In a deeper sense, the political commitments of the American professoriate are the coefficient of a radical rejection: the rejection of those allegiances to the past—to "cherish and protect something"—without which education is no more than ideological indoctrination. In other words, what we are facing is not merely a failure, but an active repudiation, of education as traditionally conceived.

There she goes again

Remember Susan Sontag? Back in the 1960s and 1970s the Heroine of Hip made something of a career of highbrow anti-Americanism. America, she complained, was a "mechanized, anxious, television-brainwashed" society, a country that was "founded on genocide" and that in its maturity indulged in a "lethal" barbarism. Sometimes she described America as "cancerous," sometimes as "inorganic, dead, coercive, authoritarian." After the World Trade Center was destroyed on September 11, 2001, Sontag, writing in *The New Yorker*, demanded to know

> Where is the acknowledgment that this was not a "cowardly" attack on "civilization" or "liberty" or "humanity" or "the free world" but an attack on the world's self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions? How many citizens are aware of the ongoing Amer-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> ican bombing of Iraq? And if the word "cowardly" is to be used, it might be more aptly applied to those who kill from beyond the range of retaliation, high in the sky, than to those willing to die themselves in order to kill others. In the matter of courage (a morally neutral virtue): whatever may be said of the perpetrators of Tuesday's slaughter, they were not cowards.

We'll leave aside the question of whether courage is "a morally neutral virtue." Aristotle thought otherwise, but then Aristotle was not the sneering connoisseur of contempt that Sontag is. What loathing she packs into the quotation marks around civilization, liberty, humanity, and the free world! Clearly she regards them as empty, hypocritical phrases, at least insofar as they are applied to the United States. And so it was only business as usual that this September 10, as the debate quickened over what to do about Iraq, Susan Sontag should deliver herself of an op-ed piece called "Real Battles and Empty Metaphors" in *The New York Times*. Real wars, she tells readers of the *Times*, have a beginning and an end, but the battle against terrorism is not a war but an open-ended "mandate for expanding the use of American power."

Readers familiar with Sontag's *oeuvre* know that she is addicted to the word "metaphor." (*Illness as Metaphor* is the title of one of her books, *AIDS and its Metaphors* the title of another.) Again and again she has warned readers about cognitive and moral distortions wrought by mistaking metaphors for realities. Now she assures us that, although "real wars are not metaphors," the war against terrorism *is* a metaphor and "one with powerful consequences." It's not that she likes the Taliban or Al Qaeda, you understand. She acknowledges that they oppose "most of what I cherish—including democracy, pluralism, secularism, the equality of the sexes, beardless men, dancing (all kinds), skimpy clothing and, well, fun." Well, it's edifying to know that Susan Sontag approves of skimpy clothes and dancing (all kinds). And we suppose it is reassuring to know that she does not "question the obligation of the American government to protect the lives of its citizens." But the actual steps our government has taken to do just that—steps, we might add, which have lately yielded rich dividends in arrests of Al Qaeda members in this country and abroad—she describes as "lobotomizing." Which is, of course, a metaphor. And mistaking metaphors for realities is a dangerous temptation, as Susan Sontag has been reminding us *ad nauseam* for the last few decades. Hasn't she been listening?

William Phillips, 1907–2002

It is with admiration and sadness that we note the passing of William Phillips, the founding co-editor of *Partisan Review*, who died last month at the age of ninety-four. In its heyday in the Forties and Fifties, *Partisan Review* was more than just a lively intellectual magazine: it was the cultural epicenter for a generation of writers and critics who helped preserve a rigorous standard of intellectual debate and openness to the fructifying currents of high modernism. The roster of writers who contributed to *Partisan Review* forms a veritable who's who of the period—it ranges from Delmore Schwartz to T. S. Eliot, from Wallace Stevens to Clement Greenberg, from Lionel Trilling and Mary McCarthy to Irving Howe and Dwight Macdonald, from Bernard Malamud and Isaac Bashevis Singer to Susan Sontag. But perhaps *Partisan Review*'s greatest achievement occurred early on when it broke from the patronage of the John Reed Club (an organ of Communist party) and evolved into a stalwart voice of liberal anti-Communism. William Phillips did as much as anyone to steer *Partisan Review* out of the grip of Stalinist mendacity, and for that, as much as for his gentleness and wit, he will be fondly remembered by many friends.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The ethnocentrism of Clifford Geertz

by Keith Windschuttle

From its origins in classical thought and Christianity, Western culture has always had a strong tendency towards universalism. This principle has long been expressed in the idea of the unity of human kind and the belief that all human beings had a common origin and were equal before God. During the European Enlightenment, these Christian concepts were secularized to produce the notions of a common human nature and universal human rights. At the same time, the West produced a scientific method that was so successful its practitioners assumed they had found the key that would open the way to knowledge of the universe. In other words, the universalizing principle has been one of the great strengths of Western culture and has been central to the self-assurance and development of Western civilization.

Nonetheless, there have periodically been major intellectual and social movements in the West that have rejected universalism in favor of relativism. These were often derived from political theories based on conflict models, such as Marxism, which saw the struggle between classes as the dynamic of history, or Nazism, which thought much the same about race. In both cases, the notion of a universal scientific method was adulterated by either class-based perspectives, such as the Russian plant geneticist Lysenko's distinction between "proletarian" and "bourgeois" science, or notions like the racial conflict between "Aryan" and "Jewish physics" under Hitler's regime.

The most recent relativist perspective to emerge in the West has been "multiculturalism," an intellectual concept and political movement that has been far more successful than any of its predecessors. It has had a major impact on the culture of most of the leading Western nations. This is especially true of the United States where, as Allan Bloom observed in the mid-1980s, multicultural relativism had captured the minds of academics and their students throughout the institutions of higher education, where not only Western values had been relativized but so had the very notion of scientific truth itself. Since then, multiculturalism has been far more than an academic theory. It has had practical outcomes such as profound changes to immigration and education policy, employer recruitment and contracting practices, attitudes to diplomacy and foreign affairs, and artistic expressions in both high and popular culture.

While there are both hard and soft variants, most versions of multiculturalism hold that all cultures are authentic in their own terms and that neither the West at large nor the United States in particular has the right to impose its beliefs and values onto others. Under these principles, the traditional universalizing project of the West cannot be sustained. Enlightenment universalism becomes an arrogant presumption

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Christianity no more than one among many equally valid religious perspectives.

While there has been no shortage of debate about its influence, there has so far been little discussion about multiculturalism's origins. Externally, it was no doubt strongly influenced by the process of decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s and the growth of the United Nations. Internally, it had much less to do with politics. Few of its advocates came from either of its relativist predecessors, and it has no obvious source in a clear-cut political ideology. Instead, its foundations lie more in academic theory and method. Perhaps its biggest single source and its major long-term sustenance has come from the academic discipline of anthropology, in particular the field of cultural anthropology that has been so influential in the United States. And within this field perhaps the most persuasive voice since the 1960s has been that of Clifford Geertz.

The cover notes on the latest collection of Geertz's essays say that the book "treats the reader to an analysis of the American intellectual climate by someone who did much to shape it."[1] This is all too true. During the past thirty years, Geertz and a number of like-minded colleagues and followers have been at the height of academic authority not only in anthropology but also in history, the social sciences, the study of literature, and the emergence of the field known as cultural studies.

Geertz has long been regarded as the doyen of cultural anthropology. He did his initial fieldwork in the 1950s in Indonesia and in the 1960s in Morocco. His major empirical work was *Negara* (1980), an analysis of the myths and ceremonies of the nineteenth-century pre-colonial Hindu and Buddhist-influenced state of Bali.

Although American cultural anthropologists have proclaimed that their interest in other cultures was for the cultures' own sake, they have often believed that a study of the exotic could illuminate their own society. Hence, in the early twentieth century, the famous Sapir-Whorf hypothesis held that because the language of the Hopi Indians had no tenses and not even a word for time, this showed their mental processes were so different from Western thought that they inhabited a different world of meaning. This both undermined the notion of a common human nature and revealed the limitations and cultural conditioning of the Western mentality, thereby destabilizing its assumptions that its observations were natural and its concepts universal. Even more famously, Margaret Mead's claim to have discovered unfettered sexual promiscuity in the Samoan islands revealed how unnecessarily inhibitive were American practices of courtship. Eventually, however, both these accounts were shown to be mistaken: the Hopi had words for the past, present and future just like everyone else, and the Samoans were far more protective of their daughters' virtue than even the most bourgeois Western family. Nonetheless, cultural anthropology continued to pursue the remarkable and the bizarre in order to reveal their implications for the folks back home.

This has long been the milieu in which Geertz operated. His study of Negara was primarily designed to undermine conventional Western assumptions. He labelled Negara a "theater state" governed by rituals and symbols rather than force. Hence it defied all Western concepts of political theory. Geertz has also written detailed descriptions of practices regarded with distaste in the West, such as cockfighting and suttee in Bali. His major interest, however, has always been the theory and methodology of his field. This is where he has been both most radical and most influential.

Geertz's best-known contribution to anthropology was his use of the term "thick description." This was not original but a concept he borrowed in the 1970s from the English philosopher Gilbert Ryle who

1 *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*, by Clifford Geertz; Princeton University Press, 271 pages, $16.95 (paper).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

argued that human gestures often had multiple layers of meaning that could only be described through the symbols used by a culture. A blink of the eye could be either an involuntary action or a wink; a knowing wink could be an ironic comment on the concept of winking, and so on. Although Geertz proclaimed his pursuit of multiple layers of meaning was a breakthrough in anthropology, a very similar methodology had actually been a familiar if rather fruitless strand of American sociology since the 1920s in the work of George Herbert Mead and his approach called "symbolic interactionism." But in the 1970s, coupled with the exotica provided by Geertz, this form of interpretation was quickly re-established in cultural anthropology as the latest thing.

Geertz contributed to this movement in a number of studies, some of which were based on his fieldwork, while others were derived from information he gleaned from history books, such as his analyses of the royal symbolism of Elizabeth I of England or the Negara court in Bali. He said that the objective of his type of interpretative anthropology was twofold: to make his readers aware there were other ways of thinking besides their own, and to make them more aware of the exact quality of their own mentalities. This was an approach, he argued, "that welds the processes of self-knowledge, self-perception, self-understanding to those of other-knowledge, other-perception, other-understanding; that identifies, or very nearly, sorting out who we are and sorting out whom we are among." This interpretative process of other-knowledge also contributed, he went on, to an understanding of human culture as a whole.

> The aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad interpretations about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics.

Put like this, of course, there is nothing objectionable about the approach. But when one looks at the kind of "densely textured facts" that Geertz chose to illustrate his thesis, there seems to be more to it than this. One topic on which he later decided to write a long essay was a Balinese cockfight he witnessed in 1958. His aim was to persuade his readers that this activity was not just a cheap, low-life blood sport on which foolish young men wagered far more money than they could sensibly afford. He called cockfighting an "art form" of monumental proportions, a Balinese equivalent of *King Lear* or *Crime and Punishment*, which

> catches up these themes—death, masculinity, rage, pride, loss, beneficence, chance—and, ordering them into an encompassing structure, presents them in such a way as to throw into relief a particular view of their essential nature.

In another essay from the 1970s, Geertz reproduced a long, verbatim description written in the nineteenth century by a Danish observer who witnessed a suttee rite in Bali, in which the cremation of a dead Rajah was accompanied by the ritual immolation of his three young and beautiful surviving concubines. In this case, Geertz again claimed literary motives. He said his purpose in recounting what he called this "celebration of the quieter beauties of personal obliteration," this "chaste hymn to annihilation," was to emulate the literary critic Lionel Trilling when the latter tried to explain the similarly distant cultural mores of Georgian England in the novels of Jane Austen.

In justifying this approach, Geertz claimed to be demonstrating how closely the work of the anthropologist resembles that of the literary critic. In particular, he wanted to show how cultural interpretation resembled a critic's reading of a poem. But it is also clear that his agenda was to persuade his readers to take a different attitude to behavior to which most Westerners would normally react with disgust. By portraying cockfighting as a noble art and the burning of widows as a spectacle of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

awesome beauty, he was engaged in the same exploit as his precursors Sapir, Whorf, and Mead: he was using the bizarre and the exotic to destabilize Western cultural assumptions.

This tactic has worked remarkably well. In the nineteenth century, the Western imperial powers used customs like suttee as a rationale for imposing their own rule of law over states where it was practiced. By the late twentieth century, the anthropological profession was urging its students to see ceremonies of this kind not as evidence of barbarism but as authentic expressions of particular cultures. The idea that Westerners might intervene in the name of their own universal principles had itself become the real cultural offence.

When Geertz came to academic prominence in the 1960s, American cultural anthropology had been dwarfed by the reputation of the French, especially the celebrated Marxists Claude Lévi-Strauss and Pierre Bourdieu. Geertz was never a Marxist and has long described himself as a social-democratic liberal. In 1967 he made a highly effective critique of Lévi-Strauss, accusing his Enlightenment rationalism and Rousseauvian Romanticism of failing to connect with the mind of the Other. Although this was published in the English neo-conservative journal *Encounter*, the intellectual trajectory Geertz was on at the time was anything but English or conservative. In 1983 he published a list of those he felt were in the academic vanguard in the social sciences. The list was an inventory of intellectual exotica, comprising the Continental philosophers Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur, the literary critics Kenneth Burke, Northrop Frye, Fredric Jameson, and Stanley Fish, and what Geertz aptly called the "all-purpose subversives": Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, Roland Barthes, and Thomas Kuhn—in short, the prophets of hermeneutics, postmodernism, and relativism who were then capturing the high ground of the humanities and social sciences and who have held much of it ever since.

Geertz has said the biggest single influence on his career was the later work of Wittgenstein, especially his arguments about the impossibility of a private language. Geertz applied this to cultural anthropology, arguing that it demonstrated that all people lived through the collective, public, symbolic culture they inherited and inhabited. "Culture is public because meaning is," he wrote in an oft-cited aphorism. Hence the proper methodology for the social sciences was cultural interpretation. There were strong parallels, he argued, between the role of the anthropologist and that of the art historian, the literary critic and even the novelist. He rejected the rival notion that culture could be explained by material forces such as politics, economics, or the law. These were themselves largely cultural expressions. In short, rather than study the structural or material features of a society in the effort to understand how it works, one had to study its culture. The way to do this was through hermeneutics, an essentially literary form of interpretation.

Although the postmodernist movement made Geertz an academic celebrity and eventually propelled him onto the faculty of the famous Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University, in recent years he appears to have some regrets about the creature he helped rear. Since it is virtually impossible today to find an indigenous culture immune from some kind of Western influence, anthropological fieldwork has become very difficult. Taking its cue from the essays of Geertz himself, a younger generation of theorists has argued that, since the study of culture is essentially a matter of literary interpretation, there is little need for the traditional empirical methods of anthropologists. Why go to all the trouble of fieldwork in remote locations where the researcher risks contaminated water, malaria, and local resentment, when one can do it all at home by simply reading printed texts and analyzing them? In his latest collection of essays, Geertz expresses some dismay at the usurpers now crowding the field.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Having carved out, from the mid-nineteenth century on, a special place for itself as the study of culture, "that complex whole, including beliefs, morals, laws, customs, acquired by man as a member of society," it [anthropology] now finds various cooked-up and johnny-come-lately disciplines, semi-disciplines, and marching societies (gender studies, science studies, queer studies, media studies, ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, loosely grouped, the final insult, as "cultural studies"), crowding into the space it has so painstakingly, and so bravely, cleared and weeded and begun to work.

Nonetheless, he still has no regrets about the major influence he has had on academic life through his justification of cultural relativism. One of the pieces reprinted in his latest collection of essays is a spirited defence of this concept and an assault on those who have dared disagree with him. This essay, originally written in 1983, is entitled "Anti Anti-Relativism." Geertz uses this title because he claims he does not want to give the topic a positive endorsement. He says that the double negative is not the equivalent of a positive in this case. He illustrates this with the example of those liberals who were opposed to McCarthyism in the 1950s. They were "anti anti-Communists" but were not necessarily Communists themselves. While this is a plausible point in the politics of the Cold War, Geertz's preference for the double negative is irrelevant since the conclusion of his essay endorses the central position to which relativism is committed: that principles of morality and knowledge are always tied to particular cultures, and that there can never be any morality or knowledge that is transcultural or beyond culture.

To give Geertz his due, he often presents his opponents' strongest case and even reproduces some of their best lines. To illustrate how audacious the anti-relativists had become, he quotes the philosopher and novelist William Gass in a passage some readers would not find quite the caricature that Geertz does:

> No more than we might expect a surgeon to say "Dead and good riddance" would an anthropologist exclaim, stepping from the culture just surveyed as one might shed a set of working clothes, "What a lousy way to live!" Because, even if the natives were impoverished, covered with dust and sores; . . . even if they were rapidly dying off; still the observer could remark how frequently they smiled, or how infrequently their children fought, or how serene they were. We can envy the Zuni their peaceful ways and the Navaho their "happy heart." It was amazing how mollified we were to find that there was some functional point to food taboos, infibulation, or clitoridectomy; and if we still felt morally squeamish about human sacrifice or headhunting, it is clear we were still squeezed into a narrow modern European point of view, and had no sympathy, and didn't—couldn't—understand.

Geertz mocks the critique of relativism advanced by his fellow anthropologist I. C. Jarvie without apparently realizing that this is the very position that he defends himself later in the same essay. Jarvie describes relativism as "the position that all assessments are assessments relative to some standard or other, and standards derive from cultures." This is a perfectly good definition of cultural relativism. Moreover, the main point that Jarvie goes on to make, that relativism entails nihilism, is also ridiculed by Geertz who does not recognize that Jarvie's logic is perfectly valid. If assessments or values are always derived from some culture, and there are no universal moral principles, then no culture can itself be assessed, because there could be no trans-cultural values to stand in judgment over any particular culture. Cultural relativism, in short, cannot condemn any culture as a whole and hence no outsider can condemn any cultural practice, no matter how barbaric. Indeed, it disables any external form of moral criticism and endorses any practice that the culture itself regards as desirable.

Geertz also rejects the argument of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

another anthropologist, Robert Edgerton, that there must be a common human nature for without it we would lack the ability even to detect behavior that is unjust, unacceptable, or deviant. Edgerton had argued that without a context-independent conception of human nature we would be unable to assess the adequacy of any society. "Our relativistic tradition in anthropology," Edgerton observes, "has been slow to yield to the idea that there could be such a thing as a deviant society, one that is contrary to human nature." In his 1992 book, *Sick Societies*, Edgerton writes:

> For these relativists, not only is each culture unique unto itself, but people's thoughts, feelings and motivations are radically different from one culture to another. It follows then that any attempt to generalize about either culture or human nature must be false or trivial unless it is confined to people who live in a specific cultural system. As these relativists have said, it necessarily follows that if peoples' minds vary so much from one culture to another, Western science is only a culturally specific form of ethnoscience, not a universally valid way of verification or falsification. In this perspective, a person from another culture remains the "Other," forever incomprehensible.

But, of course, if the Other really was unfathomable, then the very anthropology upon which Geertz based his career could not have been done. Without the existence of at least some common components to human nature, it would be impossible to understand the meanings of other cultures. Perhaps the best refutation of cultural relativism is the practice of anthropology itself, which depends upon anthropologists living with, interrogating, and comprehending the symbols of other human groups, activities that would be impossible if both sides did not share many assumptions from the outset.

Anyone who reads the several collections of essays that compose most of the corpus of Geertz's work will be struck by his apparently self-deprecating modesty. He often spends considerable time explaining the position of those he opposes and canvassing a range of opinions both for and against them. He hedges many of his assertions with qualifications to show he is not an absolutist even about his most cherished opinions. Apart from an often cryptic parting shot, many of his essays contain very little forthright opinion of his own about the targets of his criticism. There is little doubt many readers would find his prose charming and his arguments disarming. All this nonetheless conceals an essentially ad hominem approach in which the author either adopts a supercilious attitude to his opponents, as if debating them openly would be beneath his dignity, or censures them in essentially moral terms. Partly through the success Geertz has had in his field, this technique is now widely emulated and defines the style of many of today's postmodernist intellectuals. Let me illustrate this with two examples.

At a conference to mark the International Year to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination in 1971, UNESCO invited Claude Lévi-Strauss to give the opening address. Lévi-Strauss recalled in his memoirs that those who asked him to give the lecture expected him to repeat the sentiments he had expressed in a pamphlet written twenty years earlier called *Race and History*. At the time, he said, he had written that work "in order to serve the international institutions," but he had since become disillusioned with their progress, especially since their main beneficiaries appeared to be their own personnel who had "moved from modest jobs in developing countries to sanctified positions in an international institution." So he decided, he said, to speak with complete frankness and to rebel against the concept of "racism" that had become so strongly in vogue.

He said that people were confusing this idea of racism with "attitudes that are normal, even legitimate, and in any case, unavoidable." A certain degree of ethnic identification, as long as it did not get out of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hand, could be a good thing. "It is not at all invidious to place one way of life or thought above all others or to feel little drawn to other values," he said. This might even be the price to be paid for the preservation and renewal of cultural values. Cultural diversity was dependent on each culture trying to "resist" those that surrounded it, "to distinguish itself from them—in short to be itself."

In recounting this story, Geertz argued that the concept Lévi-Strauss was discussing was not so much racism as "ethnocentrism." The latter was a term that had not existed in 1971, but when Geertz was writing in 1985 it had assumed enormous intellectual and moral force. Ethnocentrism represented a failure to value the human other. It was a reflection, Geertz suggested, of a distant past when "so-called" primitive cultures referred to themselves as "The True Ones," "The Good Ones," or just "The Human Beings," in contrast to other tribes who dismissed one another as "earth monkeys" or "louse eggs," that is, as not fully human. Although those days were long past, Geertz said, ethnocentrism entailed the same logic and had the same appeal. Most people were comfortable in their "imprisonment" within their own cultural traditions, he claimed. Humanity, however, could no longer live under such conditions.

> Whatever once was possible and whatever may now be longed for, the sovereignty of the familiar impoverishes everyone; to the degree it has a future, ours is dark. It is not that we must love one another or die (if that is the case—Blacks and Afrikaners, Arabs and Jews, Tamils and Singhalese—we are I think doomed). It is that we must know one another, and live with that knowledge, or end marooned in a Beckett-world of colliding soliloquy.

Now, the speech by Lévi-Strauss did not do anything especially audacious or offensive. It did not applaud the white race against the black, or Western civilization against the barbarians. It simply made some qualifications to what its author saw as the extremes to which contemporary anti-racist thought was being taken, especially its utopian view of the prospects of cultural harmony. In fact, lurking within his complaint appeared to be a now familiar French concern about the encroachments being made by English, German, and, in particular, American culture on Gallic life. Yet for this minor offence Lévi-Strauss was castigated by Geertz and rebuked as the progenitor of a dark future.

This kind of response is now routinely applied to anyone who does not accept the intellectual package offered by multiculturalism. It says that if you disagree with me, and support anything other than my position on ethnocentrism and cultural diversity, you are a morally bad person who will open the way to a bleak future for the human species.

Geertz has made a similar critique of those who question the virtues of the indigenous tribal societies of the world, especially those like Ernest Gellner and Karl Popper who have argued that they need to overcome the "big ditch" between them and the civilized world. In a recent article on the art historian Ernst Gombrich in *The New York Review of Books*, Geertz concluded:

> At a time when the grand opposition of civilization and barbarism is becoming again a common coin of both cultural and political discussion . . . it will be well to keep in mind the dubiousness of the whole Ariel and Caliban procedure. We need to find in "primitivism," whatever it may or may not be, something other than the image of our fears.

In other words, if you support the modernization of primitive societies and their introduction to Western standards of education, health care, and employment, you are suffering from xenophobia and paranoia.

Once it would have gone without saying that ad hominem arguments of this kind were gravely deficient. They address neither the evidence nor the logic of their op-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ponents' case and rely upon what amounts to little more than personal insult. Yet today the resort to the ad hominem is par for the course in almost any field of the humanities and social sciences.

This is one more outcome of the intellectual tendencies discussed here. Indeed, it is a logical outcome of the postmodernist relativism that Geertz has done so much to institutionalize. If there are no universal standards, then there can be no common grounds for debate. People are reduced to talking past one another from the enclaves of their own position. Once you have identified the political position of your opponents, enough has been said. Debate is reduced to calling one another other names.

The multiculturalist outlook was originally developed to serve the interests of many of the subjects of anthropological investigation, especially the indigenous people, peasants, and the landless of the underdeveloped world. It was intended to change damaging attitudes towards them and their beliefs about themselves. It would generate respect, combat racism, and foster cultural understanding and harmony. It would also lessen Western arrogance by revealing to the West the ethnocentric nature of its own assumptions. It hoped that the accomplishment of these objectives would be fostered by the kind of interpretive anthropology that Geertz and his colleagues practiced, by drawing large conclusions from small, densely textured facts and supporting broad interpretations about the role of culture in the construction of everyday life.

Thirty years down the track it is hard to find many positive outcomes from these worthy sentiments. Those underdeveloped countries that have succeeded in turning their fortunes around have accomplished this not by rejecting the West but by emulating it, especially its principles of economic and political liberty. Those that have remained stagnant and impoverished or which, like Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe, are now in a rapid downward spiral towards the same status, are those that have accepted multiculturalism's anti-Westernism and pursued its relativist goals. Within the West itself, indigenous minority groups like the Australian Aborigines who have been subject to policies derived from multicultural premises have seen critical measures of well-being, such as literacy, health, and life expectancy, all reversed from levels they had attained in the 1960s.

While cultural anthropologists have by no means been the only figures responsible, they have given these policies the imprimatur of academic respectability. They have endorsed an ideological package that has flattered third-world rulers, indigenous elites, and the bureaucracies of international organizations, but at considerable cost to ordinary people in the countries they have influenced.

Yet it is still hard to understand what they actually thought they were doing. How could they have imagined they were assisting those they studied by encouraging some of their most destructive myths and practices? How, for instance, could it have helped underdeveloped countries accumulate capital for social and industrial development by portraying the reckless gambling of cockfighting as the symbolic equivalent of some of the great classics of Western culture? How could it have advanced that essential part of modernization, the emancipation of women, by glamorizing barbaric, misogynist practices like suttee? How could it have assisted third-world countries to overcome their numerous problems by telling them that those problems originated in Western arrogance? What value could there have been in a methodology more concerned to compare itself to the interpretation of poetry than to make criticisms of indigenous illiteracy and superstition? It is hard to escape the conclusion that cultural anthropology, cultural relativism, and multiculturalism, far from being vehicles of intercultural communication and harmony, are instead demonstrations of the moral vanity and self-indulgence of their Western authors: in short, conspicuous examples of the very ethnocentrism they purport to reject.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Undressing the Victorians

by Roger Kimball

Manners are of more importance than law. . . . The law touches us but here and there and now and then. Manners are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform and insensible operation like that of the air we breathe in.

—Edmund Burke, "Letters on a Regicide Peace"

The artist used to be at war with the Philistine. Today, for fear of being tainted with élitism or with failing to meet the elementary requirements of the democratic outlook, your intellectual abases himself before the power-hungry world of show-business, or fashion, or advertising.

—Alain Finkielkraut, *The Undoing of Thought*

When "Sensation: Young British Artists From the Saatchi Collection" opened at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in the fall of 1999, the museum thoughtfully included a mock "health warning" with its press material. "The contents of this exhibition," the advisory began, "may cause shock, vomiting, confusion, panic, euphoria, and anxiety."

In fact, what the exhibition (which had originated at the Royal Academy in London) chiefly caused was an unbearable sense of tedium. Sure, there was an outcry about the several odious objects on view. (Remember the blasphemous picture of the Virgin decorated with cutouts from pornographic magazines and clumps of elephant dung?) And Rudolph Giuliani, then mayor of New York, gave the "arts community" its biggest thrill in years by threatening to withhold city funding if the museum insisted on showing the Virgin de la merde picture. "You don't have a right to a government subsidy for desecrating somebody else's religion," he said at the time. "[I]f you are a government-subsidized enterprise, then you can't do things that desecrate the most personal and deeply held views of people in society." What a delicious access of indignation *that* supplied! For many years now, bourgeois cultural institutions like museums and theaters have been gratefully embracing every new "transgressive gesture" as soon as it rolls off the assembly line. How refreshing, how novel—how *transgressive* when you come right down to it—to encounter some old-fashioned moral resistance at last. Naturally, members of the "arts community" roundly denounced Mayor Giuliani as a philistine and worse (Nazi Germany was invoked, as were the interventions of Senator McCarthy). Secretly, in their heart of hearts, I suspect they were offering him thanks. In these latitudinarian days, it's not often that the beautiful people have the opportunity to indulge themselves in such preening ecstasies of self-righteousness.

Apart from the gleeful circus of indignation, however, "Sensation" was not much of a sensation. Oh, there were plenty of rebarbative things on view: you could tell that the curators had worked overtime to pique the jaded palates of a public surfeited on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"challenging" art. But was there anything new? Were there any aesthetic innovations? Were there even any novel perspectives or ideas? No, no, and no again. It was the same tired old stuff. Pubescent mannequins studded with erect penises? Been there. Bisected animals suspended in glass tanks? Done that. Even the focus of moral outrage—the sacrilegious Virgin—was hardly more than a reprise of stuff Dalí and other surrealists had paraded half a century ago. In straining for effect, the objects assembled in "Sensation" wound up communicating chiefly the effect of straining.

Still, "Sensation" did harbor two lessons, a moral lesson and a commercial one. The moral lesson centered on the great tedium "Sensation" produced. Here at last was unmistakable confirmation of a strange phenomenon that had been flickering into focus here and there in the art world for some years: that an exhibition or performance can be disgusting without being shocking. The full implications of this development, I believe, have yet to be absorbed. Among other things, it suggests that the whole movement of "cutting-edge" art has entered a terminal phase. Like pornography—from which it is often indistinguishable—contemporary "avant-garde" art is a drearily formulaic, naff, and ultimately desperate enterprise. The stimulus is artificial, the means degrading, the result an exercise in futility. The overall effect is boredom.

Curiously, the commercial lesson of "Sensation" seems, at first blush, to cut in the other direction. For while the exhibition was a yawn in the gallery, at the box office it really was a Sensation. Like the crowds who congregated with touching anticipation to see the next exotic attraction when P. T. Barnum, overwhelmed with patrons, nailed up a sign emblazoned with the legend "This Way to the Egress," the art-going public reported for duty en masse at the entrance to "Sensation."

The great question is to what extent the Barnum gambit is replicable. The jury, I believe, is still out on that one. Even today, probably, there are people who would line up to see so strange a thing as an Egress; and doubtless there are many others eager to share with them their own encounters with that elusive beast. It is clear at any rate that the Brooklyn Museum is wagering that the trick still has legs. Hence its enthusiastic acceptance of "Exposed: The Victorian Nude,"[1] the latest Barnumesque import from Britain. Billed as "the first exhibition to chart the moral and aesthetic controversies about the nude body in English visual culture," "Exposed" has more than a little in common with Barnum's innovative approach to crowd control. For one thing, there is the great discrepancy between expectation and fulfillment. "Exposed" is marketed as this year's sexy art event. The chief publicity image is from *Cadmus and Harmonia* (1877), a little-known painting by Evelyn De Morgan (née Pickering). It's a sort of Botticelli-meets-the-pre-Raphaelite-brotherhood production: svelte, leggy nude, posed like the figure in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* but with the regulation pre-Raphaelite red hair and an alarming "soulful" expression. You might think that the thirty- or forty-foot snake, coiling up from the damsel's legs, would be grounds for alarm, but Harmonia seems to be perfectly at ease with her pet—Nastassja Kinski before her time—since she gently if absent-mindedly presses its head to her breast. The catalogue for "Exposed" features a detail of this picture with a thin paper band positioned carefully across Harmonia's bosom. To open the catalogue, you have to break the band and expose her nakedness: get it?

1 "Exposed: The Victorian Nude" opened at the Brooklyn Museum of Art on September 6 and remains on view until January 5, 2003. The exhibition, which was previously seen at Tate Britain, London, and Haus der Kunst, Munich, travels to the Kobe City Museum, Kobe, in February 2003 and Geidai Museum (The University Art Museum), Tokyo, in June 2003. A catalogue of the exhibition, edited by Alison Smith, has been published by Tate Publishing (288 pages, $45).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It's about as exciting as the Egress must have been.

Much of what one sees in "Exposed" is like Harmonia and the paper band. That is to say, there is everywhere the hint, the suggestion, the atmosphere of prurience. It is partly the result of the works on view, but only partly. A lot of it comes from the presentation: the arrangement of works, the accompanying commentary, the whole premise and marketing of the exhibition. (One section is called "Sensation! The Nude in High Art." But what is sensational about nudes in high art?) There are a handful of overtly pornographic works on view in "Exposed"—Aubrey Beardsley's comical "The Impatient Adulterer" (1896), for example, some drawings by Turner of copulating couples, and some photographs by Edward Linley Sambourne. But the real obscenity lies elsewhere. It is grounded largely in the diffuse, hothouse ickiness of eroticized idealism that hovers about many of the works: Ernest Normand's *Bondage* (*c.* 1895), for example, which depicts the Pharaoh inspecting a possible recruit to his stable of slaves, or Gustave Boulanger's *Phryne* (1850), or John Collier's *In the Venusberg* (1901).

These are seriously bad pictures: cloying, aesthetically static, cringe-making in their combination of coy, sugar-glazed, semi-concealed eroticism and spurious high-mindedness. This is not a novel observation about high Victorian painting. Consider the case of Frederic Leighton, represented by more than a dozen works in this exhibition. Leighton's work was immensely popular in its day. But even at that time some observers grasped the essentially meretricious nature of his work. For example, Henry James, writing in 1882 about Leighton's picture *Phryne at Eleusis*, noted that "his efforts remain strongly and brilliantly superficial. His texture is too often that of the glaze on the lid of a prune-box; his drawing too often that of the figures that smile at us from those receptacles." The great mystery about artists like Leighton is the source of their charisma. For no sooner are they dead than the spell is broken. Leighton, James wrote, was "one of those happy celebrities who take it out . . . in life." Reflecting in 1897 on the great public funeral accorded to Leighton, and the great public indifference to his work that immediately followed his interment, James asked: "Is the key to the enigma that there was too much noise yesterday, or that there is not enough of it today?" For a hundred years or so, artists like Leighton subsisted in the dignified silence provided by well-deserved obscurity. It is one of the aims of exhibitions like "Exposed" to generate enough noise that no one notices the process of unjustified disinterment they depend upon.

In *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* (1956), Kenneth Clark famously distinguished between the ideas of nakedness and nudity. "To be naked," Clark wrote,

> is to be deprived of our clothes and the word implies some of the embarrassment which most of us feel in that condition. The word nude, on the other hand, carries, in educated usage, no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenceless body, but of a balanced, prosperous, and confident body.

The curators of and contributors to the catalogue for "Exposed" do not much like Clark's book. His passing allusion to the "great frost of Victorian prudery" is several times cited only to be dismissed. For the governing presupposition of "Exposed" is that, deep down, the Victorians were just as sex-obsessed as we are only, alas, their moral and religious commitments tended to interfere with their sex lives. This presupposition, elaborated in the menacing strains of contemporary lit crit jargon, imbues the catalogue and other official commentary for the exhibition with an anachronistic aura that is partly noxious, partly just comic. For example, in "The Nude in Nineteenth-Century Britain: 'The English Nude,'" Alison Smith, the exhibition's chief curator, writes that in *Bathers* (1876), a seemingly innocent

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

picture of boys swimming, Frederick Walker was "imagining a male utopia that surreptitiously admitted a homoerotic chivalric gaze, while at the same time honoring a popular pastime." I am not sure exactly what a "homoerotic chivalric gaze" is, but I am confident that Walker's muddy, sentimentalizing effort has nothing to do with a "gaze" of that or any other sort.

One is never far from the jarring effect of anachronism in "Exposed." Of course it is most patent in the catalogue. The vertiginous effect is due partly to the argot, which is wildly at odds with the subject matter. Smith again: "the female nude was assigned to the confined urban context of the studio or bedroom which had so disturbed critics earlier in the century. Designed to illuminate a seamy side of the female nude, such works succeeded in disturbing the idea of the artistic or unified body through a process of fragmentation." But what does "disturbing the idea of the artistic or unified body through a process of fragmentation" have to do with the works on view? What indeed does it even mean?

The element of anachronism is not only rhetorical, however. In "Prudery, Pornography and the Victorian Nude (Or, What Do We Think the Butler Saw?)," Martin Myrone draws on a pornographic 1993 comic strip in order to drag in Margaret Thatcher and her call for a revival of "Victorian Values." "For its proponents," he explains, "Victorian values stood for cleanliness, hard work, strict self-discipline and economy, and a code of morality centered on 'normal' heterosexual family life." Why the scare quotes around "normal"? Does Myrone believe that there is no such thing as a normal heterosexual family life? Does he believe that the Victorians denied it?

One of the contributors to the catalogue quotes the comment that "The Victorians and sex have been exhaustingly, if not exhaustively, written about." And how. You put down the catalogue for this show feeling very tired. One last example. In "Thoughts and Things: Sculpture and the Victorian Nude," Michael Hatt tells us that

> the question of colouring the nude clearly has ramifications for ideas about gender. The coloured female nude is problematic because it turns the nude into a sign of sexual desire, of base physicality; exactly what the ideal is designed to expunge. Here decorous femininity turns into deviance: the matron is in danger of prostituting herself.

An interesting thought experiment for the ecologically minded: what if academics were forbidden to use the word "gender"? How many acres of wood pulp would we save?

There are a handful of good pictures in "Exposed." Few of them are Victorian. Indeed, "Exposed: The Victorian Nude" is misnamed. It should had been called "Exposed: The Painful Effort to 'Sensationalize' One-hundred and Fifty Anaphrodisiac Pictures, Most of Which Are Victorian." What, for example, is Walter Sickert (1860–1942) doing in a exhibition supposedly devoted to the Victorian nude? Or Gwen John (1876–1939)? Or William Orpen (1878–1931)? These are not Victorian painters, spiritually or chronologically. And what is the point of the smirking film clips from Pathé Frères, *circa* 1903? What do they have to do with "The Victorian Nude"?

The answer is nothing. But even to ask that question is to misunderstand the governing impulse behind "Exposed." The Victorian nude was merely the pretext, the occasion for this exhibition. In fact, "Exposed" is almost entirely about pretext. In the first place, a group of (mostly) undistinguished art works is gathered together as the pretext for an exercise in sexual politics and cultural warfare. The curators are not interested in these objects for their aesthetic merits (which is just as well, since considered aesthetically most of what is on view in this exhibition is period-piece kitsch). On the contrary, their chief interest is in spinning a psychodrama about the supposed repression or the inversion or the complications of sex in the Victorian period. The assembled works of art provide the excuse

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to fight some contemporary ideological battles: battles about the place of sexuality in public life, the ideals of modesty and seemliness, the concept of sexual normality.

In other words, "Exposed: The Victorian Nude" is yet another chapter in the so-called culture wars. Over the past decade or so, it has become increasingly clear that this war is a battle about everything the Victorians are famous for: the "cleanliness, hard work, strict self-discipline," etc., that one of the people responsible for this exhibition speaks of with such contempt. Do those values, those virtues, articulate noble human aspirations? Or are they merely the repressive blind for . . . well, you name it: narrowness, hypocrisy, the expression of a "white, patriarchal, capitalist, hegemonic," blah, blah, blah? As our distance from the Victorian era grows, we can appreciate more and more what giants they were: intellectual, political, scientific, cultural, and moral giants. They did not, it is true, excel at painting or sculpture. But in virtually every other department of human endeavor, the Victorians are models we dismiss or patronize at the cost of our own diminishment. "Exposed" is almost entirely predicated on such a patronizing attitude (an attitude that is only half-masked by the lurid interest in the sentimental schlock that is Victorian painting). Which means among other things that "Exposed" is yet another attack on the moral, aesthetic, and cultural patrimony that Burke extolled under the name of manners.

Finally, exhibitions like "Exposed" are commercial pretexts for institutions like the Brooklyn Museum, which are devoted to transforming themselves from repositories of our cultural heritage into beacons of trendiness. Like almost every other art museum in the Western world, the Brooklyn Museum is engaged on an ambitious building program. What will occupy its capacious new galleries? Hitherto seldom-seen items from its permanent collection, in part. But also a great deal of contemporary art and many exhibitions like "Exposed." The Brooklyn Museum took "Exposed" in the hope that it would be another "Sensation": a box-office success with an abundance of buzz. Artistic quality enters the equation only incidentally, if at all. As of this writing, the calculation does not seem to be paying off particularly well. Which may mean that what "Exposed" exposes is above all the limits of cynicism in marketing art. Or perhaps it only means that Victorian nudes are just too anemic to function as a crowd-pleasing Egress.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Albert Speer: the good Nazi?

by David Pryce-Jones

Albert Speer was Adolf Hitler's intimate and trusted friend. Throughout the Thirties, the two met on an almost daily basis in Berlin or Munich. When relaxing in the Berchtesgaden mountains, they went by themselves on afternoon walks, rejoicing in mutual fantasies mostly about art and architecture. Among the grandiose projects they actually achieved were the Reich Chancellery in Berlin and the Nuremberg stadium for staging the annual rallies which expressed the power of the Nazi party. Inventing for Speer the post of General Inspector of Buildings, Hitler steadily promoted him to the point where other Nazi leaders and rivals believed that he might well become Hitler's successor. Nobody else in Hitler's circle, not even Josef Goebbels, was shown such favoritism. The relationship will always amaze.

Abruptly appointed Minister of Armaments in February 1942, Speer revealed outstanding managerial skills. He succeeded continuously in raising the production of all types of weaponry even when the Third Reich was foundering under ever more massive bombardments on its factories and supply lines. But it was the use of forced labor which permitted Speer to achieve these goals, and Nazism to continue fighting to the very end. Several million unfortunate men and women were press-ganged from all over occupied Europe for Speer's purposes, and huge numbers of them died. Speer probably did more than any other single person to try to win the war for his master. The favorite architect had become a monster like the rest of them.

Fritz Sauckel, a particularly brutish Gauleiter, was in charge of drafting the forced laborers, virtually slaves. He reported to Speer. At the postwar Nuremberg trials he was sentenced to death, and hanged. The American judge, Francis Biddle, argued that as Sauckel's superior Speer should also receive the death penalty. But Speer's defence in court had been extremely agile. Hitler's regime, he now claimed to understand, had indeed been criminal, and in a blanket confession he accepted his share of responsibility for what had been done, but pleaded that he had never known the full facts. Facts were not his domain; an artist, he had lived in the realm of the imagination. After two days of fraught discussion among themselves, the judges concluded that Speer's contrition at least was genuine, and they passed on him a sentence of twenty years in prison. His fellow-defendants, from Hermann Goering downwards, held Speer in contempt, partly for repudiating the Hitler on whom his career had depended, but more for what they were sure was flagrant lying. Most people have since suspected that he elaborated this strategy to save himself from the gallows he deserved.

In prison and out, Speer was to spend the rest of his life writing about himself and his career, and giving innumerable interviews.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His autobiography, *Inside the Third Reich* (1970), is the most closely observed portrait of Hitler ever written. Unprecedented in a Nazi of such high rank, it is also a work of skilful apologetics, a general confession of guilt which carefully refrains from complete descriptions of the motives and actions which have given rise to that guilt. The reader is left to make what he can of it. Speer's last service to the cause was to contrive in this way the alibi of the "decent Nazi," that is to say, someone who did not realize that his ideals were necessarily criminal. This was a tortuous exercise in make-believe. Midway between an emblem and a scapegoat, he dramatized in person the difficulties of conscience—often amounting to outright denial of reality—which so many Germans experienced in coming to terms with Nazism.

Classical drama turns upon the responsibility of the individual for his fate. Perhaps the Furies are after him, and there is nothing he can do to be free from them. Or perhaps some fatal weakness of character impels him to make a choice which brings doom upon his own head. Immoderate love or hate, ambition, rage, jealousy may induce a fatal misrepresentation of reality. With particular skill Speer managed to play on all these high themes at the same time, varying the emphasis to suit himself.

Hitler, in Speer's postwar version, had been a magician, Mephistopheles to his Faust. On the eve of his trial at Nuremberg, Speer could still tell an American interrogator that he, the interrogator, understood nothing of the charisma of a man like Hitler. In his autobiography, he accused himself of weakness of character coupled with inordinate ambition: He had shone, he wrote, only in the reflected glory of Hitler's power, striving "to gather some of his popularity, his glory, his greatness, around myself." Whoever is in thrall to a magician's spell has by definition lost moral independence and can no longer help himself.

But it was in the misrepresentation of reality that Speer really outdid himself. He had stage-managed the annual Nuremberg Party rallies at which Jews were vilified and outlawed; he had driven through the shattered streets after the Kristallnacht pogrom; for years he had collaborated with Himmler and Goebbels; he had visited concentration camps and the underground caves of the Dora rocket project where forced laborers under his control were dying of starvation in their tens of thousands, and on one occasion he had even prevented the summary execution of a prisoner; he had been a close friend of Dr. Karl Brandt who in the name of medicine had killed Jewish prisoners in grotesque experiments; he had at his fingertips the figures of the rolling-stock needed for arms' production but diverted instead to deporting the Jews; he was privy to Hitler's inmost thoughts and had listened to his incessant racist rantings; and still he claimed to have known nothing about the mass-murder of the Jews which was so central a program for Hitler, his colleagues, the Nazi party, and the ordinary German soldiers and civilians participating in it.

Only in the summer of 1944, he writes in his autobiography, did a good friend, Karl Hanke the Gauleiter of Upper Silesia, tell him about something so terrible occuring in the territory under his control that he could not bring himself to describe it. With hindsight, Speer conceded, this must have been an oblique reference to Auschwitz, but at the time "I did not query him, I did not query Himmler, I did not query Hitler." From that moment, he continues, "I was inescapably contaminated morally; from fear of discovering something which might have made me turn from my course, I had closed my eyes." With ingenious and self-serving prevarication, he had hit upon a strategy for taking blame not as one of the prime movers of the crime of mass-murder, but solely as an unwitting accomplice.

In further mitigation, he also claimed good deeds. Once the war was evidently lost, Hitler gave orders for a scorched earth policy. The German people had shown themselves weaker than their enemies; letting him down, they deserved to go under

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for ever. With a colleague, Speer apparently raised the possibility of killing Hitler by dropping poison gas down the ventilation shaft of his bunker. Here was an eerie and perhaps fantastic echo of the real gassing of millions of Jews.

More positively, Speer did what he could to save bridges, factories and other installations vital to survival. His conscience was aroused, then, only when Hitler's criminality victimized non-Jewish Germans themselves. In March and April 1945, in an atmosphere of the highest drama as the Allies were closing in, Speer at some danger to himself went to meet Hitler several times in the Berlin bunker. His intention, he records, was somehow to confront Hitler with the facts that the war was lost, and further resistance pointless. In the event, face to face, he instead expressed his loyalty and even offered to stay with him to the end. Whatever mutual deceptions were involved, whatever lies, tears came into the eyes of both men. Speer justified himself afterwards with the remark that "somehow it was desperately important to me to get a glimmer of human contact with Hitler." Which is the more striking, the vapidity of those words, or the vanity which impels them? The last of these extraordinary scenes was on April 22. A few days later Hitler was dead, and Speer in Allied hands.

Common sense must suggest that Speer's denial of any knowledge of the mass-murder going on all around him could not conceivably be true. It was 1974, and his autobiography had already been published, when I interviewed Speer. He had known Unity Mitford, the daughter of Lord Redesdale, and she had made a prewar exhibition of herself by working her way into Hitler's close circle, hero-worshipping him and extolling Nazism. In the course of researching in order to write the life of this prototype of a fanatic, I had just found in Vienna some of her diaries, recording her days with Hitler and his cronies. As a rule, these cronies were crude and jumped-up street-fighters who knew no better, the *chauffeureska*, in Putzi Hanfstaengel's witty updating of the *soldateska* or military adventurers who had made life miserable in the Thirty Years War.

In almost every way, in mind and in appearance, Speer was a contrast to them. He was socially secure. Like Unity, he came from a civilized and prosperous background. His father had been an architect and property developer in Mannheim, who considered himself a liberal; his mother came from a successful merchant family. Thoroughly conventional, a little secretive, they may have repressed emotions in the way that polite people usually did at the time, but they did not neglect Speer's upbringing. Also like Unity, he had been in a position freely to develop artistic tastes and to strike out on his own. In fact he seems to have strayed almost haphazardly into the Nazi Party in 1931, the same year that his mother quite separately joined it.

When I saw it, the Speer house in Heidelberg was sepulchrally dark, with heavy carved furniture redolent of Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany. Speer himself was tall, and elegant in a well-cut suit. The cast of his face was sorrowful, his brown eyes lackluster, and his manner languid, quasi-aristocratic, indicating that he was putting up with being importuned by questions which he had already answered many times. But when we went over the details in Unity's diaries, he became a different person, suddenly vitalized by the return to the past. He could remember who had been present when and where, what had been said to Hitler, and what exactly Hitler had replied. His recall was phenomenal. His eyes were now bright. If he were to have the chance to live his life all over again, I was convinced, he would take exactly the same choices as before. Whatever the tongue might say, the heart was unchanged. I thought of him as Iago, honest Iago.

Ambition, greed, opportunity, the joy of using brute force to have their way had no doubt galvanized the *chauffeureska*. In spite of his well-bred air, so it was with Speer too at the level at which he had operated,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pushing aside rivals and furthering his career along with the rest. It is also a telling detail that he accepted a considerable sum of money from a fund at Goering's disposal, in order to buy a property not far from Berlin. There was a *chauffeureska* side to him after all.

According to the doctrines of nineteenth-century Romanticism, the artist supposedly owes allegiance solely to his inner vision. How is this species of individual heroics to be squared with Speer's uncritical subordination to Hitler? The psychologist Alexander Mitscherlich was the first to detect an "erotic component" in the Hitler-Speer relationship; in less loaded language, Hitler saw in Speer the kind of artist he himself would have wished to become, an alter ego realizing a private vision in the face of a hostile world. Unhesitatingly and in public he described Speer as a "genius." What they recognized and admired—perhaps even loved—in one another, was this vision which so glibly allowed them to misrepresent crime as historic greatness. The undoubted sincerity of their mutual perceptions is what gives their relationship its sinister glitter.

Historians have exposed Speer. On October 6, 1943, Himmler and assembled Gauleiters attended a conference in Posen. Himmler spelled out to his audience the mass-murder of the Jews, its implications, and its long-term significance for Germans. Erich Goldhagen was the first to discover that Speer had addressed this conference in the morning, while Himmler spoke in the afternoon, with a damning reference in his speech to Speer as "not one of the pro-Jewish obstructionists of the Final Solution." Goldhagen held that Speer had listened to Himmler's speech, which of course would have meant his definitive condemnation. Further research showed that Goldhagen was mistaken and that Speer had in fact left the conference at midday to call in on Hitler at his headquarters. Nonetheless it is inconceivable in the context that nobody discussed the gist of Himmler's speech with Speer.

Matthias Schmidt in 1982 proved that Speer was anxious to profit from the forcible "evacuation" of Jewish-owned apartments in Berlin, or what were even more euphemistically called "de-tenanting measures." In a memorandum of November 27, 1940, Speer inquired, "How is the action for the clearance of those thousand Jewish flats going?" More striking still, Speer afterwards tried to falsify the record in this matter. Then in 1995 the respected journalist Gitta Sereny published the aptly titled *Albert Speer: His Battle with the Truth*. During the long years in which she had worked on this book, she "grew to like" Speer. Fascination with that sinister glitter of his, and the complexity of his lies, injected into her account a sentimental tendency to excuse him, but all the same she put her finger on his familiar evasive technique of generalizing about specifics and "admitting a little to deny a great deal."

Joachim Fest is the author of one of the most authoritative biographies of Hitler, and in this judicious, comprehensive, and well-written (and well translated) new book[1] he now has the last word on Speer. He gives credit to the idea that Hitler and Speer saw in one another the fulfillment of their most profound aspirations. "I'll sign anything that comes from you," Hitler said to Speer, which, as Fest observes, was a *carte blanche* he gave to nobody else. They were two of a kind in their lack of ordinary human responses. So distant was Speer that his wife could bitterly remark that she intended to telephone him announcing that Frau Speer wished to speak to Herr Speer. He could not break through emotionally to his children. In Fest's words, he was a man of many abilities, but no qualities.

Carefully Fest steers his way through the career. Nazi ideology may not have meant much to Speer, but he was susceptible to its aesthetic side, "the new beginning, the grand gesture, ostentation and self-glori-

1 *Speer: The Final Verdict*, by Joachim Fest; Harcourt, 432 pages, $30.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fication." One of his closer colleagues handed in his notice after the Kristallnacht pogrom with the words, "I don't work for people like that." So heady was it to be catapulted by Hitler into power that Speer easily turn a blind eye to what was happening. Superior intelligence, and with it an odious sense of self-satisfaction, then enabled him to get the better of the *chauffeureska* and everyone else in his way, including Goering, Goebbels, Martin Bormann, and Himmler.

In Fest's mind there is no doubt that Speer had the information about the crimes that Hitler and the regime were committing. "The weight of evidence about the extent of his knowledge of the crimes is indeed crushing," he concludes after a thorough survey of this evidence. He goes on to make the powerful observation that at Nuremberg and afterwards Speer's confessions and self-denunciations sounded "dutiful" because he had only "a superficial understanding of the fundamental norms against which he had offended."

Had Speer been merely a member of the *chauffeureska*, his behavior would be readily explicable. Brutality speaks for itself. But he was an educated intellectual, suave and worldly, and that is what is so frightening about his example. The Furies were not pursuing him. In full control of his destiny, he subordinated himself to Hitler voluntarily and eagerly. Fest sees this surrender as typical in the troubled Germany after the First War, the Communist revolutions, and inflation. Speer was one among millions of Germans suddenly without clear values or purposes; Hitler was an experience waiting to happen to them, filling a void created by the general moral collapse.

Fest goes further. The German variety of Romanticism had popularized the myth that the artist was not subject to any norm or law; he could do as he pleased because the demands of his art freed him from morality and the mundanities that go with it. Considering themselves artists engaged upon the great *Gesamtkunstwerk* of "Germania," Hitler and Speer arrogated to themselves the privilege of rearranging reality to suit themselves. In true German Romantic spirit, indeed, the fact that such art had led to destruction and death on an unprecedented scale served to certify its greatness. This doctrine, Fest concludes, "contributed hugely to the atrocities of the age," and of course it trickles down into the present, where many an artist and writer continue to claim that they and their work rightfully should enjoy unrestricted privilege, no matter what the political or personal consequences. O Art! What crimes are committed in thy name.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Victor Hugo: The ghost in the pantheon

by Eric Ormsby

Victor Hugo was born two hundred years ago this year and his countrymen have been trying ever since to contain him. They resorted first to the tried-and-true: ostracism and outrage at his brazen Romanticism followed by acclaim and fervid acceptance. When this failed to muzzle him, they elected him to a position in the Assemblée; the transcripts of his speeches there are punctuated with such exclamations as "great sensation among the audience" and "tumults of applause." They then accorded him a seat beneath the monumental cupola of the Immortals at the Académie Française.

Hugo, avid if not insatiable, gulped down outrage and prestige equally with the alacrity of a tomcat swallowing minnows. As his fame grew, he continued to overspill all bounds: manuscripts in every genre (as well as drawings and paintings) flowed so copiously from his fluent pen that his publishers fell into permanent backlog; decades after his death new works of his were still being published. Mounting acclaim failed to hobble him. Then, in 1851, his enemies contrived to force him into exile, ostensibly for criticizing Louis Napoleon—Napoleon III after 1852. But hadn't Hugo always been a bit too exuberantly Promethean, if not downright Shakespearean, to be genuinely French? Installed for eighteen years in comfortable exile on the Channel Island of Guernsey, he not only flourished but achieved his most resounding successes. Undeflectable, standing every morning before a writing lectern that faced the waters of the English Channel while he sipped coffee left over from the previous evening, Hugo composed thousands of lines of verse, most of it wonderful; he wrote novels, all still in print, still read and loved by millions the world over; he wrote plays, manifestos, epics, diatribes. His scattered jottings and observations of a long lifetime—he lived to be eighty-three—fill more than a thousand pages of fine print (collected under the title *Choses vues*). Returned from exile in 1870, Hugo found himself a national hero, admired by even such truculent younger contemporaries as Flaubert. Desperate, the French had only one recourse left: in 1876 he was made a senator. Even this failed to lull the Titan into complacency. When Hugo died, in 1885, he was given an immense state funeral followed by "Pantheonization"—who but the French could have devised the verb *panthéoniser*?—a terminal accolade that usually suffices to muffle even the most obstreporous for all eternity. The Hugolian colossus should have lain still; few spirits, marmorealized in *la Gloire*, ever re-arise, and an oblivious and grateful nation can go about its mundane affairs without disruption.

No such luck. Victor Hugo refuses to lie still. Like some restless, perpetually chattering Dracula he pops up at every turn, draining the anemic veins of his compatriots who prefer less rumbustious fare,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

say, the desiccated Beckett or the (God help us!) bloodless Paul Auster. To give but a few examples: on a visit to my local Gallimard bookstore in Montreal, I notice that in celebration of the great man's 200th birthday, one can now obtain Hugo's complete works in a sprawling set of fifteen overstuffed volumes, totalling 17,500 pages. I am told that the set is selling well. (Needless to say, it isn't really complete.) Again, on the French website "La Poésie Française," more poems by Hugo are available than by any other French poet: 357 Hugo texts appear compared to 156 for Baudelaire, 167 for Verlaine, or a measly 127 for La Fontaine, the latter, along with Paul Claudel, his only serious rivals as the greatest of French poets. (There are a number of other websites on Hugo in this bicentennial year, one of the most attractive and interesting being that of the Maison Hugo in the Place des Vosges.)

In a very real sense, of course, Victor Hugo has surpassed even himself, becoming as much a mythic figure as Quasimodo or Jean Valjean; thus, "Victor Hugo" has come to resemble the "Borges" which the "real" Jorge Luis Borges learned to fear and suspect. Hugo's egomania, his unquenchable amatory gusto, his political battles and debacles, have become as important to the legend as his writing. This phantom-Hugo threatened to overwhelm Hugo the man even during his lifetime, prompting Jean Cocteau's quip that "Victor Hugo was a madman who thought he was Victor Hugo." But to English readers, sadly enough, Hugo is known almost exclusively as the author of *Notre Dame de Paris* (*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*) and *Les Misérables*, the former in its film versions and the latter in its highly successful musical comedy guise. Even his several other superb novels are closed books to English speakers. In a recent tribute to Hugo in a local newspaper I learned that we should all read him because in addition to his many celebrated gifts, he had a wonderful sense of humor: hadn't he written *The Man Who Laughs*? The critic clearly hadn't read the novel which is about a child who is deliberately mutilated by having a smile carved into his mouth for life to amuse a king; the book illustrates Hugo's love of the grotesque but it isn't rich in laughs. Hugo's great dramas and his even greater poetry remain utterly unknown; music lovers may appreciate the songs based on his verse (Hugo himself refused to allow his poetry to be set to music during his lifetime), especially in the sublime renditions of Dame Felicity Lott, but few Americans have any acquaintance with the poetry, in the original or in translation.

For various reasons, Hugo's poetry has not so far succeeded in English translation; the verse has suffered the fate of a few other marvelous nineteenth-century poets—one thinks of Goethe or Leopardi—whose lyrics simply do not travel well. This has a lot to do with the intrinsic differences between French and English poetry. In his indispensable survey *An Essay on French Verse*, Jacques Barzun pointed out that one reason for this is that French is a language of pure vowels whereas English is not. What we do to our poor long-suffering vowels, from stretching them on the rack of the Southern drawl to snapping them out of the eastern air like lizards catching flies, would appall a French speaker for whom the vowels, particularly in poetry, have a sculpted and crystalline integrity. We can appreciate the force of the French vowels in such a line as Hugo's "L'ombre était nuptiale, auguste et solennelle" ("The dark was nuptial, and august, and solemn," in Brooks Haxton's new translation[1] and in another new version: "The shade was a deep, nuptial, solemn thing."[2]). But we are less likely to swoon at the effect than a native speaker; in fact, we are liable to be wary of such effects as overly sonorous, excessively magniloquent. Our wariness is well founded:

1 *Victor Hugo: Selected Poems*, translated by Brooks Haxton. Penguin, 141 pages, $12.00 (paperback).

2 *Selected Poems of Victor Hugo: A Bilingual Edition*, translated by E. H. and A. M. Blackmore. University of Chicago Press, 661 pages, $35.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hugo's poetry almost always strikes a high and sublime note. Though his intonations and accents permeate the work of such successors as Baudelaire and Rimbaud, Hugo does not rely on spleen and bitter sarcasm to the same degree as those poets, even if he outdoes them both in sheer vituperation. Hugo is lofty, and this falls with a hollow clangor on our ironic ears. Furthermore, Hugo almost always composed both dramas and poetic sequences in strict forms; he is a supreme technician of rhyme. Should a translator attempt to duplicate his rhymes in English, or rely on blank verse, to convey the sweeping effect of the original?

Now Hugo's two-hundredth birthday has inspired several new translations of his poetry, and the results are by and large quite gratifying. The most impressive, and probably the best, is the huge selection lovingly prepared by E. H. and A. M. Blackmore. This pair of translators has had the audacity to translate much of the verse in strict rhyme and meter, and the results are often surprisingly fine. Arranged chronologically and illustrated throughout by Hugo's own drawings and paintings, their selection for the first time gives the English reader the full range of Hugo's accomplishment as a poet. Even better, they have prefaced each of Hugo's collections, from *Odes et ballades* of 1822 to *Océan*, published posthumously in 1942, with intelligent and informative prefaces which set each work within a biographical and historical context. Their notes to the poems are succinct but apposite. The Blackmores' devoted and lavish attention to the nuances and subtleties of Hugo's verse should prompt a re-evaluation of this poet, one of the greatest writers of the nineteenth century and, in fact, a European genius of the stature of Goethe and Pushkin.

Of course, in the end only one question matters: do the translations convince, if not as credible poems in their own right—an almost impossible criterion—but as convincing representations of Hugo's originals?

One of Hugo's greatest poems is "Booz endormi" from his vast epic cycle *La Légende des siècles*. The poem is based on Ruth 3:1-8, in which Ruth the Moabite woman spends the night sleeping at the feet of Boaz, the aged and wealthy Israelite. It is a poem not only about the consequences of this unexpected union, out of which the line from David to Jesus will be established, but about a young woman's preference for an old man (Hugo was fifty-seven when he wrote the poem). Hugo's poem has a quiet majesty which steadily builds as the poem progresses; this is in part because he avails himself of simple declarative lines that have a solemn Biblical plainspokenness about them:

Booz s'était couché de fatigue accablé;
Il avait tout le jour travaillé dans son aire;
Puis avait fait son lit à sa place ordinaire;
Booz dormait auprès des boisseaux pleins de blé.

Here is the Blackmores' version of this opening stanza:

There Boaz lay, overcome and worn out.
All day he'd labored at his threshing floor;
Now, bedded in his usual place once more,
He slept, with grain bagged everywhere about.

Brooks Haxton, in his much slimmer selection, translates the same lines:

Boaz, overcome with weariness, by torchlight
made his pallet on the threshing floor
where all day he had worked, and now he slept
among the bushels of threshed wheat.

Haxton's version reads well though it is quite far from the original French. Hugo says nothing about "torchlight" nor does he mention a "pallet." Moreover, Haxton has altered the motion of the lines by linking them together and employing enjambment. The Blackmores, by contrast, succeed at reproducing the rhyme scheme; they even manage to suggest the alexandrine line with its almost obligatory caesura. In the French, there is a pause in the first line before the phrase *de fatigue accablé* and the Blackmores convey this with their strategically posi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tioned comma after *lay*. True, like Haxton, they pad a bit ("overcome and worn out"), but theirs is a reasonably measured and finished translation. If it lacks the true Hugolian grandeur, who will blame them when they have otherwise come so close?

The problems with Haxton's version appear as the poem moves on. He tends to extrapolate, and he changes the original in ways that I for one would not condone. Another effect of which Hugo is a master is to cap a stanza with an aphoristic line. In the fifth stanza, for instance, he writes:

> *Booz était bon maître et fidèle parent;*
> *Il était généreux, quoiqu'il fût économe;*
> *Les femmes regardaient Booz plus qu'un jeune homme,*
> *Car le jeune homme est beau, mais le vieillard est grand.*

One can easily imagine the grizzled older Hugo, no chilly Parnassian, whispering this final maxim into the ears of some young soubrette. Haxton, however, expands the line and abandons its axiomatic flavor:

> . . . for youth is handsome,
> but to him in his old age came greatness.

The Blackmores get it right: "Young men have beauty, but old men have might." This is properly pithy, and captures the tone of the French (and "might" excellently suggests the force of *grand*). Like La Fontaine (whose maxim this could be), Hugo often clinches high-flown sublimity with a tart punch-line. Again, in the final stanza of the first section, Haxton introduces Ruth before Hugo does; he writes: "And though fire burned in young men's eyes,/ to Ruth the eyes of Boaz shone clear light." What Hugo actually wrote is this, again in the Blackmores' version: "In the eyes of the young men there is fire,/ But in the eyes of the old, illumination." The simple stratagem of translating "light" (lumière) as "illumination" (as opposed to Haxton's "clear light") makes Hugo's intention gently but forcefully transparent.

Towards the end of the poem Hugo wrote: *Tout reposait dans Ur et dans Jérimadeth*. As the Blackmores have it: "all slumbered in Jerimadeth and Ur." Now every French schoolkid knows that there is no such place as "Jerimadeth." Hugo invented the name for the sake of a rhyme and because he liked the sound of the word. This sovereign playfulness amid such solemnity of diction is a masterstroke, but Haxton fluffs it when he writes: "All slept, all, from Ur to Bethlehem." Perhaps he disapproves of Hugo's hijinx, perhaps he wishes to make more explicit the lineage culminating in Christ; whatever the reason, he takes too great a liberty here for my taste. The ending of "Boaz Asleep" is one of Hugo's finest achievements. Here, in the Blackmores' version, the plain, stately, end-stopped lines, cadenced yet declarative, flower open into a grand but simple vision:

> All slumbered in Jerimadeth and Ur;
> The stars enameled the deep, somber sky;
> Westward a slender crescent shone close by
> Those flowers of night, and Ruth, without a stir,
> Wondered—with parting eyelids half revealed
> Beneath her veils—what stray god, as he cropped
> The timeless summer, had so idly dropped
> That golden sickle in the starry field.

Even here, Haxton cannot resist meddling. Instead of the simple phrase *ouvrant l'oeil à moitié sous ses voiles* ("half opening her eye beneath her veils"), he gives poor Ruth a sudden ophthalmic disorder: "eyes half opened,/under the twingeing of their lids." And the *faucille d'or* is not a "golden scythe," as Haxton translates it, but a golden sickle. The rich grains and crops of the opening—Boaz is a farmer, after all—here assume a transcendent form, with the moon acting as a sickle in the "field of stars."

Both Haxton and the Blackmores also tackle one of Hugo's finest late poems, the elegy for his old friend Théophile Gautier, who died in 1872. This grand poem had al-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ready been rendered partially by Robert Lowell in his *Imitations*, and it is hard to see how anyone could surpass his version. Lowell imitates the rhyming couplets of the original (which neither Haxton nor the Blackmores attempt) and captures the inmost feeling of the poem:

> We die. That is the law. None holds it back,
> all leans; and this great age with all its light
> glides to the shadow, where we flee—
> pale, black!
> The oaks felled for the pyre of Hercules,
> what a harsh roar they make in the red night!
> Death's horses throw their heads, neigh, roll
> their eyes—
> they are joyful, for the shining day now dies
> . . . the ancient sea that made us young is dry,
> youth has no fountain, age has no more Styx,
> and Time moves forward with his heavy blade,
> thoughtful, and step by step, to the last ear.
> My turn comes round; night fills my troubled
> eye,
> which prophesies the future from the past,
> weeps over cribs, and smiles at this new grave.

Without being literal, Lowell remains surprisingly accurate both to the sense and the feeling of the original. The same cannot be said of either Haxton or the Blackmores. The last five lines of the poem, rendered literally, read:

> The harsh reaper with his wide blade moves
> forth,
> thoughtful, step by step, towards the
> remaining wheat;
> it's my turn; and night fills my troubled eye
> which guessing—alas!—the future of doves,
> weeps over cradles and smiles at tombs.

Haxton seems to me here to capture the cadence of Hugo's lines rather well, though he mangles the doves:

> Lost in thought, the mower with his long blade
> moves on step by step into the standing wheat.
> My turn has come. My good eye, muddled
> now
> by nightfall, straining to make out the shapes
> of doves, weeps over cradles and smiles at
> tombs.

The magical phrase *l'avenir des colombes* (which Lowell shrewdly omits) puzzles at first. The Blackmores render this by: "and gloom is filling my/Troubled sight, as I guess what future the doves must face." Can this be what Hugo meant? That doves, like everything else that lives, must die? But the line is ambiguous and can mean not simply "guessing the future of the doves," but "divining the future from the doves." It is, in other words, a supreme flash of hope: at the very moment when darkness fills his eye, the poet augurs the luminous stir of a future life. And it is for this reason that, like some ancient saint, he cries over cradles and smiles at graves: death is discerned as a beginning.

It was, of course, for this very Christian-like attitude, sundered as it was from official Christianity or any formal church, that earned Hugo the undying obloquy of such ferocious Catholics as Paul Claudel who could announce, in one of his *Five Grand Odes*, that Hugo's soul was "with the dead dogs." Claudel mistrusted Hugo's passion for social justice, in part because of Hugo's pronounced anti-clericalism. But there was much more, I think, to Hugo's thirst for justice than mere sloganeering. From an early age he expressed a profound empathy with the outcast, the despised, the rejected. That empathy takes on melodramatic forms in the novels but in the verse, it can pierce the reader with sudden poignancy. Hugo was drawn not solely to galley slaves, prisoners, thieves and vagabonds, but to their analogues in the natural world. One of his deepest poems, from *The Contemplations*, his magnificent collection of 1856—one year, be it noted, before the publication of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal*—begins: "I love the spider and I love the nettle/ Because they are hated." One of Hugo's most astute early commentators, the great Austrian poet and dramatist Hugo von Hofmannsthal, suggested that this plastic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ability of identification developed early in Victor Hugo's childhood when he haunted the public gardens of Paris. "In the very soil of those gardens," von Hofmannsthal wrote, "Hugo's marvelous intimacy with trees and flowers, with birds' nest and stars, took root and those thousands of lines of verse, with their magisterial abundance and compression, those thousands of metaphors, . . . were also rooted there." And yet, this is perhaps too easy; for Hugo's plasticity extended beyond the small and insignificant and despised to other, more daunting exemplars. In *Les Misérables*, Hugo's affinity with the implacable policeman Javert is just as striking and just as deep as his sympathy for Jean Valjean. The public Victor Hugo was not a hollow shell within which the private, and authentic, Victor Hugo crouched; rather, the outer man and the inner man existed in a kind of agonized hypostasis. As von Hofmannsthal again put it, with regard to Hugo's drama *Hernani*, what is involved is "a world of inner antitheses hurled forth into a world of outer antitheses." Hugo teemed with antitheses, and it is perhaps this quality that constitutes the indissoluble riddle of his personality: the public man speaks in the most intimate of whispers; the private man thunders anathemas; and yet, somehow, the voice is one and unmistakable.

The ability to assimilate virtually anything—from a lowly spider to a vengeful magistrate to God Himself (a posthumous collection was entitled simply *Dieu*)—is amazing enough; even more astounding, however, is the countervailing ability to exteriorize and to cast such a profusion of identities into objective form. Hugo possessed both abilities in inexhaustible abundance and it was this perhaps which prompted an admiring Baudelaire to write of him (in his "Reflections on Some of My Contemporaries") in a strangely negative vein that only accentuates his reverence:

> He who is not capable of painting everything—palaces and hovels, emotions both tender and cruel, the circumscribed affections of a family and universal love, the grace of the green world and the marvels of architecture; all that is sweetest and all that is most horrifying, both the inner significance and the outer beauty of every religion, the moral and the physical physiognomy of each nation, in short, everything, from the visible to the invisible, from heaven to hell—that man is no true poet in the widest sense of the word and in the heart of God.

Victor Hugo was such a poet for Baudelaire (whose verse the aging Hugo admired), as for every French poet who has followed after him, even those—especially those—who (like Paul Claudel) have most despised and repudiated him. Everyone probably knows the anecdote in which André Gide is asked who the greatest French poet is and replies, "Victor Hugo, hélas!" But, as the Blackmores recount in their excellent notes, Théophile Gautier put it both more justly and more admirably when he remarked, after Hugo returned from exile in 1870, "talking poetry with Hugo is like talking theology with the Lord God." Both of these new translations, despite wide variation and the occasional infelicity, give us back something of Hugo's distinctive accents and in so doing set a vivid ghost free from its pantheon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dubai, Havana & choosing between evils

by Anthony Daniels

Whenever I enter someone's house, I feel myself irresistibly (perhaps unresistingly would be a more honest way of putting it) drawn to his bookshelves. All flesh is grass, of course, but since Gutenberg at least, all mind is print. And absences from shelves are almost as telling as presences.

What is true of people is true of countries, particularly those in the grip of official orthodoxies. He who would know such a country must visit its bookshops. They won't tell him everything, but they will tell him quite a lot.

Two cities could hardly be more different—in this age of globalization and cultural homogeneity—than Dubai and Havana, but recent visits to the bookshops of both taught me a lesson that I should not have expected to learn: that, accustomed as I am to deplore the superficiality and simplifications of the Enlightenment, I am nevertheless a product of it. No Enlightenment, no me: and none of my friends, either. This might be perfectly obvious, but a great deal of labor goes into the denial of the obvious: for the obvious is an affront to intellectuals, including me, whom it threatens with redundancy.

Dubai is Islamic and Havana is Marxist, of course, but both comprehensively reject the Enlightenment ideal of intellectual inquiry wherever it might lead, though Dubai is a liberal state by the standards of the region. In the bookshops of both, you get the powerful impression that, fundamentally, all questions (at least, those that relate to philosophy, history, and how life should be lived) have long been settled, and that all that needs to be known is already known, or rather has been revealed. All that remains to be done is to slot the facts into the worldview.

Even so recherché a subject as the history of medicine is recruited to serve ideological ends. In Dubai, for example, the one volume I found on the subject was a reprint of Edward G. Browne's 1919 Fitzpatrick Lectures to the Royal College of Physicians of London, originally published in 1921, entitled *Islamic Medicine*. Browne was professor of Arabic at Cambridge, a formidably erudite man who was also a doctor: and while his little book made no extravagant claims for Islamic medicine, it clearly pointed to a time, albeit several hundred years ago, when that medicine was superior to any other.

The purpose of the republication of this obscure, worthy, rather dull but learned little book is clear: it not only pays homage to a glorious past—to the Arabs of that period, wrote Browne, Frankish medicine appeared most barbarous and primitive compared with their own—but it refutes the accusation (that many must subliminally suspect of having some truth) that Islam is incompatible with modernity, since Islam was once modernity itself. Thus the self-sufficiency of Islam, as a philosophy, religion and way of life, which is asserted in the vast

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

majority of books in Dubai bookshops, is restored.

In Havana, the one volume of medical history that I found was a lengthy and very detailed biography—in English—of Carlos J. Finlay, the greatest medical scientist that Cuba has ever produced, by José López Sánchez. Born in Cuba in 1833, of Scottish and French parentage, Finlay studied medicine at Jefferson Medical College before returning to Cuba where, in 1881, he first put forward the hypothesis of the mosquito transmission of yellow fever, a brilliant leap of the imagination: for it took great boldness to concern himself not with the agent of the disease, which remained unknown, but with its vector. He conducted experiments to prove his hypothesis: but there has been controversy ever since over the conclusiveness of these experiments, and doubts that enabled Walter Reed to claim himself, and to be acclaimed, as the real discoverer of the mosquito transmission of this scourge of warm humid climates. Yellow fever was indeed eliminated from Cuba by Colonel Gorgas and his team in the wake of the American conquest of the isle, but the application of a discovery and the discovery itself are not the same thing. So far as I am able to ascertain in my non-specialist way, the claims of Finlay are superior to those of Reed.

Even allowing for Finlay's greatness, however, it is unusual to find, as I did on my last visit to Cuba a dozen years ago, the complete works of a nineteenth-century scientist at a greatly subsidized price in a bookshop for the general reader: especially when few other books were available. One might suspect that something other than a disinterested fascination with the past was at work, and one would be right.

The preface to the biography, by the chairman of the Finlay Institute in Havana, Dr. Concepción Campa Huergo, makes obligatory reference to the mastery of Finlay studies of one Fidel Castro, and laments only that the great scientist (Finlay) "lacked a leader like Fidel Castro and a revolution like the one he made." The author's preface informs us of the superior historiography he is fortunately able to employ:

> This book is the product of this time of deep economic and social changes, determined by the Cuban socialist revolution that generates a different culture, deeper and penetrating, which allows [the analysis of] the facts in their real historical dimension, without [surrendering] to conventional empiricism or tolerant subjectivity.

And what is the real historical dimension? It neither takes long to find out nor surprises us when we do. Discussing Reed's appropriation of the discovery to himself, we read:

> The most varied explanations [have] been advanced about Reed's and his helpers' motives in usurping Carlos J. Finlay's [primacy in the discovery]. Some have tried to reduce it to a mere moral issue, and have assessed the deed as infamous, as inspired by malicious intentions, thus qualifying the actors rather than the true author of this intellectual plunder: North American imperialism.

The point is not so much that no case can be made for the author's conclusions (Sir Ronald Ross, the discoverer of the mosquito transmission of malaria, thought Finlay had been cheated, and unsuccessfully nominated him for the Nobel Prize), but that no other view is publicly expressible in Cuba and is indeed compulsory. The continual repetition of the story renders history a branch of propaganda: on my previous visit to Havana, twelve years before, I bought a book entitled *Alas Amarillas* (Yellow Wings) by Sergio Amaro Méndez, on precisely the same subject. It ended by quoting a speech by Fidel Castro—whose else?—at the celebrations in 1981 of the centenary of the publication of Finlay's mosquito hypothesis. The Medical Historian en Jefe said:

> it is incredible that the Yankee imperialists should have tried to grab [Finlay's] glory. Of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> course, the claims that it was a Yankee doctor who discovered the vector of yellow fever are ridiculous.

Indeed, what else is the wealth of the United States but plunder? Ridiculous to suggest anything else.

If medical history can be made to shore up official ideology, it is scarcely surprising that other, more promising subject matter is made to do so. Both places believe that they are in possession of the essential truths of human existence, even if they are not necessarily at the forefront of the small, particular, empirical, and inessential truths of human existence. Both Dubai and Havana, indeed, illustrate in their own way the coexistence of higher and lower truth: for Dubai is a gleaming modern city erected by foreigners using the latest technology with no expense spared, a technology to which Dubai has contributed nothing whatever, while Havana is a magnificent architectural relic of the unenlightened past, before the essential truth was discovered, that is falling into ruins for lack of the merest material means to maintain it.

In Dubai, the bookshops sell books both in Arabic and English. The books in Arabic are entirely religious. The books in English can, like Gaul, be divided into three: the purely technical (medical and computing for the most part), the job lots of remaindered and deeply obscure books sold at knock-down prices by itinerant and presumably none-too-honest British salesmen (how else can one account for the presence in more than one bookshop of a volume entitled *The Etymology of the Place Names of South Staffordshire*, a work of limited appeal, I should imagine, even in South Staffordshire?), and a vast tide of Islamic apologetics in English. The strange thing is that there are structural similarities between these apologetics and the apologetics one finds in Havana, where the bookshops are divided in two: those that sell in pesos, and those that sell in dollars, but neither of which category is well-stocked.

Given that both places believe themselves to be in possession of ultimate truth but neither can be said to be at the forefront of human destiny, it is perhaps not surprising that, in order to explain this anomaly, a certain paranoia so easily creeps into the literary productions available in both places. When Armando Hart, the perennial ideological hack of the Cuban Revolution, writes in fluent *langue de bois* in his *Cultura para el desarrollo* (Culture for Development):

> the control of information and of the instruments to mold public opinion by minorities in countries that are, moreover, dominated by groups and social classes that are in numerical minorities, constitutes a matter from whose analysis we cannot shrink.

he is echoed by one Dr. Muhammad Ali Alkhuli, in *The Crisis of Western Civilization*, (published in Jordan) when he writes:

> Freedom of expression theoretically requires press freedom, which is subordinate to wealthy people and pro-Israel pressure groups, who fully control press and media for their own motives and interests.

One is never very far from the hidden hand—not to be confused with Smith's invisible hand, of course—in the literature to be found in both cities. The list of publications of a man pseudonymously called Harun Yahya, some of whose works are available in every bookshop in Dubai (and also in Muslim bookshops in Britain), include such titles as *The Secret Hand in Bosnia*, *The Holocaust Hoax*, and *Children, Darwin Was Lying!* The one copy I possess of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, published under the title Jewish Conspiracy, is in a universally available series of books published by the International Federation of Student Organizations, based in Kuwait. It is number fifty-seven in the series; number five (the one I bought in Dubai) is entitled *Individual and the State*. The introduction to the *Protocols* gives a sufficient in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dication of the intellectual atmosphere and the level of critical thought of the series:

> The *Protocols* may briefly be described as a blueprint for the domination of the world by a secret brotherhood. . . . They have to be read, re-read and studied in all seriousness. . . . Muslims are their target but they can frustrate all the wild dreams of Jewry by acting promptly and wisely. The odds are many but the job has to be done. . . . Surely by the help of Allah they can turn the tides. Indeed, it is a great honor, a privilege, a sa'adat to contribute what one can to the Jehad against this menace.

Both cities—as judged by their bookshops—live in a mentally dichotomized world: a good us and a bad them. While the western democracies, particularly the United States, are the object of most of the obloquy, a phenomenon such as Hinduism does not escape Islamic censure. A book entitled *Idol Worship vs. God Worship*, by Muhammad Imran, published in India, excoriates Hinduism in a fashion so forthright as to be downright offensive. One cannot help but wonder what fate a Hindu might enjoy who published a book in a Muslim country pointing out with disdain the elements of pagan superstition that persist in Islam. As for the criticism of Hinduism that it lacks a fixed doctrine, it provides a welcome relief from the stultifying monomania of Islamic literature, and recalls a passage from Gibbon in which he admiringly describes the religious life of Rome:

> Thus the Hindus have an extraordinary wide selection of beliefs and practices to choose from: they can be monotheists, pantheists, polytheists, agnostics or even atheists. They may follow a strict or a loose standard of moral conduct, or they may choose instead an amoral emotionalism or mysticism. They may worship regularly at a temple or may not go there at all. (*Idol Worship vs. God Worship*)

> The policy of the emperors and the senate, as far as it concerned religion, was happily seconded by the enlightened, and by the habits of the superstitious, part of their subjects. The various modes of worship, which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people, as equally true; by the philosopher as equally false; and by the magistrate as equally useful. And thus toleration produced not only mutual indulgence, but even religious concord.
>
> The superstition of the people was not embittered by any mixture of theological rancour. (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*)

It is, of course, precisely the lack of theological rancor that that the monomaniacs of the world object to: for they assume that someone does not care for truth who does not demand, at the point of a sword, that everyone else adhere to it.

The criticisms of the western democracies that are to be found in Dubai and Havana alike are not always without foundation, of course. No reader of *The New Criterion*, presumably, needs to be persuaded of the existence of disagreeable aspects of western modernity. When both Armando Hart and Dr. Alkhuli point to crime, violence, and vulgarity in western society, they are not wrong: but they are wrong to see only crime, violence and vulgarity. They never turn their magnifying glasses on their own societies—for very obvious reasons, both prudential and ideological. They cannot recognize shortcomings because to do so would destroy the kind of assumption about their doctrines that they share, and Muhammad Imran expresses succinctly:

> Muslims are quite different and distinct from other people . . . complete adoption of Islam and strict adherence to the practice of Muhammad . . . must bring them success in every field of life and must lead them to triumph over every other community.

It would not, of course, be difficult to find similar sentiments in Havana bookshops, where, for example, you can still buy *Nada podra detener la marcha de la historia* (Nothing Will Be Able to Stop the March

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of History), the transcript of a series of long interviews with Fidel Castro. In Dubai adherence to Islam assures final victory; in Havana, to Marxism-Leninism.

No habit could be more alien to a post-Enlightenment (or even post-Renaissance) mind such as mine than that of reliance on textual exegesis as the source of truth, a habit that is evident in the bookshops both of Dubai and of Havana. In Dubai, this tendency—present in every single book—reaches its apogee in a volume entitled *The Final Day: Paradise and Hell in the Light of the Qur'an and Sunnah*, by Dr. Umar Sulayman Al-Ashqar, Professor at the Shariah College of the University of Jordan. The question that agitates the mind of Professor Al-Ashqar when he asserts something is not whether it is true, but whether it is sufficiently attested in the Koran or in the hadith, which is the sole criterion of truth:

> Most of the sinners . . . who enter Hell will be women, as is reported in the two Sahihs (of Bukhari and Muslim) via Ibn 'Abbas: in the khutbah given during a solar eclipse, the Prophet said, "I saw Hell and I saw that most of its inhabitants were women."

And that settles the matter for the author, just as the huge size of the people in hell is settled (and indeed is every other matter):

> According to a hadith narrated by Abu Hurayrah, the Messenger of Allah said: "The distance between the shoulders of the kafir in Hell will be like three days' travelling for a fast rider."

The continual sifting among the textual entrails for the truth—the only way of knowing it—is somewhat less medieval in Havana than in Dubai, but it exists nonetheless. For example, a book that has been on sale in Havana for a dozen years (and there is, let me remind you, a very reduced number of books on sale in that city) is *El pensamiento económico de Ernesto Che Guevara* (The Economic Thought of Ernesto Che Guevara) by Carlos Tablada Pérez. The manner of proceeding is this: first we must acknowledge Guevara as an untouchable figure of the Revolution, sacred in the same way as Mohammed. Then we try to find out, by reuniting various scattered texts (the Guevaran hadith) what he thought about economic questions, so that we reach the truth, not about what he thought about economic questions, but about the questions themselves: for we have already accepted, a priori, that whatever he thought must be the truth. And so a passage like the following:

> we affirm that in a relatively short time the development of the [socialist] mentality will do more for the development of production than material incentives . . . which presupposes that work will cease being a painful necessity and become instead an agreeable imperative.

This appalling adolescent drivel (which, of course, thinly conceals the most absolute economic tyranny) serves as revealed truth in Havana, which it is impossible to question. In the Museum of the Revolution, a hagiographic video is shown of Guevara in which he is praised as being "forever young," though "forever the arrogant immature prig" might better capture it. To say so in Havana, however, would be like proclaiming there is no God in Dubai, and that Mohammed was not his prophet but an impostor.

When I see the uses to which our freedom is so often put—the terrible vulgarity, degradation, and triviality of modern popular "culture"—I am sometimes tempted to think that the drastic curtailment of freedom would be no bad thing. But then I visit the bookshops of Havana and Dubai. Everything in life is a choice between evils, and I choose our own evils, however much they may upset me. Freedom of thought at least makes improvement without terrible upheaval conceivable, and is in any case an incontestable good in itself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New poems
by Elizabeth Spires & Richard Tillinghast

Like water

It hadn't been three months since he had died
when we sat together in your living room,
a green world going on outside, the June wind
blowing hot and hard, bending each leaf and branch,
while inside all was still: a still interior where
three women sat in shadow stirring summer drinks,
the room the same as it had always been,

but changed, his absence palpable. You said,
"I thought I'd gradually miss him less, the way
a craving for a cigarette lessens a little after weeks
of going without. It's not like that." You paused,
drawing in a breath. "It's like a thirst that deepens
as each day passes. Like water," you finally said.
"I want him back the way I want a drink of water."

—Elizabeth Spires

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Back again

I didn't belong there anymore—
the city made that clear.
The stones excluded me.
Even the rain laid no welcoming
hand on my shoulder.

The hotel in Dominick Street alone
had any clear notion
who I might be, with my wounded
luggage and eyes. Only it and I
would own up.

I must have chosen it, now I look
back, for the bleak
views from its fire escapes;
and the night I lay unsleeping in 105
till the hotel sprang awake

to a clatter of crockery and the clear message
of bacon and porridge.
Or that week adrift in 208
back in nineteen ninety-something
that can go unrecorded.

The room decor, all pastels and flounce,
I had seen when its chintz
was fresh. Now it exhaled
staleness and coalsmoke and end-of-
weekend angst.

Who was I to come back in this kind of mood?
my room key queried.
Who did I think I was,
anyway? The stain on the carpet
wondered.

—*Richard Tillinghast*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Concordances

You see a lightning bug
and think
Shooting star!

Trout rise to cadmium-yellow
sprawls of bug-body and gossamer wing
hatching at NBA playoff time
as they do every year,

and slurp them off the brimming surface.

I cast to brown trout in the birch pool
while uphill somebody stays
indoors and watches the game.

Madison Square Garden
reaches me
through an open window.
The players, uniform on the T.V. screen
in blue-and-red, teal-and-white,
swarm to the basket like feeding trout.

—*Richard Tillinghast*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As long as I have these saddlebags

As long as I have these saddlebags
I think I will be all right.
The sun in their weave, their wool stained
  like a stained glass window,
their scorpion shapes and stylized camels
and cities with gates locked against marauders—
those clinched and vigilant symbols
doze like evolved watchdogs on my sofa.

One day I will lose this coin.
But as long as I have it,
I am walking the Street of the Fortunate
above the blue fabric, the silver scales of the sea—
through Cherries-that-Weigh-down-the-Bough Street
on foot down the Street of the Little Holy Wisdom

keeping in my pocket the coin that will
  pay my way across the Golden Horn
in a long wooden craft, not new,
the boatman singing above the pulling oars.

The journeys I bring these saddlebags along on
are slow marches
over mountains freckled with snow,
over black walnut trees that were cut down
to make my floors.

It's true I am kindling a fire today
on my own bricks,
not throwing together a rough blaze
with truck drivers and camel drivers and smugglers
stoking a water pipe on the dirt floor
of a caravansaray with gates standing open
to scavenger dogs gnawing bone-scraps, and wolves

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and wind off the Hindu Kush.
I don't shiver with cold and the rain doesn't
needle my shoulders.
I don't have to favor my right knee as I climb
or wonder if my boots will fail me.

In the pilgrimage that is underway
I might not be among those walking.
But my fingers, like these saddlebags, are stained
with the colors of the journey
and my hands smell of the currency of passage.
Praise God I am one of the travellers
as long as I have this coin in my pocket.

—*Richard Tillinghast*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Theater

Good enough for Shakespeare?

by Mark Steyn

In 1938, *The Boys From Syracuse* opened with an announcement. The two huge masks of Tragedy and Comedy enter loftily. From underneath, two gleeful comics emerge: "If it's good enough for Shakespeare, it's good enough for us!" They exit tapping and the show begins.

That's the whole thing in a nutshell. When they put Rodgers and Hart on the cover of *Time* that year, the headline read: "If it's good enough for Shakespeare, it's good enough for us!" It was on the show's posters.

In 2002, *The Boys From Syracuse* are back, exhaustively overhauled from head to toe. And, just to let you know this isn't your father's *Syracuse*, the rewrites start from the word go. This time round, two chorines clad in Caesar's Palace tunics enter and slough off the revised announcement: "If it was good enough for Shakespeare, it's good enough for you." They don't dance off, they walk off, and the overture starts.

Given that everything has changed and nothing in this painstakingly over-revised revival is accidental, it's worth pausing to consider that first small amendment, which manages to distill everything you need to know about the gulf between *Boys* '38 and *Boys* '02. The new version is tarter, bitchier, a put-down, and somehow a little less joyful. If that's a lot to read into a monosyllable, so be it. But the first *Boys* was a big-hearted, rowdy explosion and the new *Boys* is cooler, detached, and strangely sour, and the divergence starts in that opening declaration.

It also helps explain why the Richard Rodgers centennial isn't turning out to be quite as much fun as it ought. Rodgers the man never imprinted himself on popular consciousness the way his contemporaries did, each carving his niche—the embodiment of the great swarming mass of humanity to pass through Ellis Island (Irving Berlin), the apotheosis of Park Avenue sophistication (Cole Porter), the restless genius who died young (George Gershwin). To most Americans, Rodgers is just his work—songs, shows, films. Measured in terms of his boundless melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic invention, he can stake a claim to being the greatest of all American composers. Not just on Broadway but greatest, period. He worked almost exclusively in short form, except for some ventures into through-composed semi-operatic turf, from *Love Me Tonight* (1932) to *Carousel* (1945). Unlike Gershwin, he had no urge to write a symphony or a concerto. What motivated him were stories and characters. But, within the confines of his chosen form, he demonstrated a wider range than most composers and dominated the leading genres of the day for two generations—first with musical comedy, then with the musical play, a form he more or less invented.

If you wanted to show off Rodgers' range on Broadway, you'd have a production of one of the heavier entries in the Rodgers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Hammerstein catalogue balanced by a fizzy revival of one of the sturdier Rodgers and Hart musical comedies. Instead, we've wound up with a gloomy *Oklahoma!*, where (as noted previously in this space) you leave the theater whistling "Pore Jud Is Daid," and to balance it the Roundabout's bizarre production of *The Boys From Syracuse* (at what we must learn to call the American Airlines Theater). *The Boys* was written because Lorenz Hart was struck by the way his thespian brother Teddy was always being confused with fellow comic actor Jimmy Savo and felt there was surely a show to be wrung out of this. And, if you're looking for a mistaken identity plot, *The Comedy of Errors* is an obvious place to start. So Rodgers and Hart took the idea to George Abbott, who rattled off an adaptation in no time and liked it so much he offered not only to direct but produce. The whole thing was up on stage within a couple of months and was the hit of the season. The two boys from Syracuse, Antipholus and his servant Dromio, are in Ephesus searching for their long-lost twins who, confusingly, are also called Antipholus and Dromio. Further confusions ensue, but so does a wonderful score, including "This Can't Be Love," "Sing For Your Supper," and "Falling In Love With Love." *The Boys From Syracuse* turned out to be the first successful musical based on Shakespeare, though Abbott retained only one line from the original: the Seeress's "venom clamors of a jealous woman poisons more deadly than a mad dog's tooth." At which point Jimmy Savo sticks his head out from the wings and says proudly: "Shakespeare!"

Joking aside, there's a useful thesis to be written on the structural similarities between Shakespeare and the lyric stage—between the Bard's comedies and musical comedies, his tragedies and musical plays. The elements that have not survived from Elizabethan drama—the masques and songs—in their infuriating inaccessibility to us nevertheless make plain that, in Shakespeare's day, the "straight play" was a lot less straight than in ours. His comedies in particular seem musical in size. But, while *Kiss Me, Kate* and *West Side Story* are to a certain extent gimmicks and no threats to their originals, the adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors* into *The Boys From Syracuse* transformed the source material permanently. This is not to denigrate the Bard. He'd taken *The Comedy* from Plautus and made the first critical improvement to the property, doubling up the laughs by making not just the masters but the servants look-alikes: this is as good an example as any of Shakespeare's stage savvy.

For his part, Abbott, the master farceur of his day, streamlined the play's structure, loosened up the comedy, boosted the women's roles and the sexual confusion, and wound up improving on the Bard. When I said as much to him, Mr. Abbott modestly excused Shakespeare: "Give the fellow a break. It was his first play"—or at any rate one of the earliest. But, as if in tribute to Abbott, ever since 1938 the most successful productions of *The Comedy* have given the impression they'd much rather be doing the musical. Your average Shakespearean director now devotes most of his creative energy to figuring out how to come up with a substitute for Rodgers and Hart. In London in 1952, they used music by Sir Arthur Sullivan; in Bristol in 1960, they set Shakespeare to the hot sound of the day, drafting in the calypso balladeer Cy Young; at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1976, Trevor Nunn turned it into a full-scale musical, using key lines in the text as cues for songs by him and Guy Woolfenden, choreographed by Gillian Lynne. This production led to Nunn and Lynne being offered *Cats*, which in a roundabout way led to Nunn directing the current *Oklahoma!*

For purposes of comparison, the latest production of *The Comedy* itself, for all its fancied provocations, is typical in its approach. The Aquila Theatre Company's version (at the East 13th Street Theatre) has a score by Anthony Cochrane, full-scale choreographed production numbers, and a lot of stylized movement that falls some-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where between synchronized swimming and a bored stewardess pointing out the emergency exits. A consensus seems to have been reached that simply staging the text of *The Comedy* is as ridiculous as doing *Carmen* and leaving out the songs.

So, given the impact that the musical has had on its source material, there's something a little perverse in the way the Roundabout, from the moment this revival was announced, has treated *The Boys* as something problematic, something flawed, something in need of being "fixed." The argument offered is a familiar one: these are "classic" songs but the book has "dated" and doesn't "integrate" them as well as well as audiences have come to "expect." This may well be true, but it presupposes that the chaps to hand in 2002 are in a position to improve on matters. Besides, while it's true that in 1938 a lot of Broadway songwriters were writing with an eye to the hit parade rather than the "needs" of the drama, Rodgers and Hart were not among them. They had zero interest in pop singers, and indeed despised most of them, but they gave a lot of thought to how music and lyrics knitted together with all the other elements in a Broadway show. *On Your Toes* (1936) was the first show to use ballet as an integral part of the storytelling, *Pal Joey* (1940) was the first musical with an antihero, etc. I think it's safe to say that the songs for *The Boys From Syracuse* are as "integrated" as Rodgers and Hart wanted them to be, and that, considering their innovations in just the latter half of the 1930s, their best riposte to the airy latterday intellectual adaptors claiming to have "solved" the "problems" in the work is: what have you done lately?

Look at the creative team of the 1938 production. Score: Rodgers and Hart. Book and direction: Abbott. Choreography: George Balanchine. Design and lighting: Jo Mielziner. Costumes: Irene Sharaff. Orchestrations: Hans Spialek. Vocal arrangements: Hugh Martin. These were all the top men (and woman) in their fields. Balanchine's heart may have been elsewhere—"He needed the money," Abbott told me—but, if he was slumming, he never let it show. No more did Spialek, one of the greatest orchestral colorists of the century, nor Martin, a young man whose vocal arrangements were like nothing previously heard on Broadway. Some of these guys were bona fide geniuses, but they hadn't yet been canonized as such. And so they just wrote the music and choreographed the dancers and sketched out the sets, and in a few weeks these exceptional, unpretentious talents had had a ball and thrown together a show: if it's good enough for Shakespeare, it's good enough for us. You can hear the joy in "This Can't Be Love": it has what Alec Wilder called that "glow" about it, the palpable sense that it was fun to write. They didn't know it was for the ages. And so they weren't fretting, as Scott Ellis's production does, about whether they were doing justice to a "classic," only whether it would work as Eddie Albert and Marcy Westcott's Act I duet.

So, in 1938, if it was good enough for Shakespeare, it was good enough for us. In 2002, the production's watchword is: it was good enough for Rodgers, Balanchine, Abbott, etc., but that's nowhere near good enough for us. Now, agonizing over the "problems" are the playwright Nicky Silver, the director Scott Ellis, the choreographer Rob Ashford, the designers Thomas Lynch and Martin Pakledinaz, the orchestrator Don Sebesky, and the vocal arranger David Loud. Silver specializes in off-Broadway fables of gay neuroses; Ellis is a journeyman stager with a short but impressive track record of lifeless revivals; Ashford won a Tony Award for his work on *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, which tells you mainly what a crummy season for dance that was; Lynch's sets for *Syracuse* are mostly wallpaper and moldings, like a Greco-Roman theme roadhouse on the outskirts of Atlantic City. It is not these men's fault that the talent pool in the New York theater has shriveled remorselessly across sixty years. But the assumptions underlying this production are the height of arrogance—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that this is the team that will finally do justice to Rodgers and Hart and correct all the missed opportunities of a supposedly cruder age of unambitious hacks like Abbott, Balanchine, and Mielziner.

In 1947, busy turning *The Taming of the Shrew* into *Kiss Me, Kate*, the authors Sam and Bella Spewack were asked for their expert analysis of the new integrated musical play: "You may remember," they said, "that the old musical comedy consisted of a story, songs, dances, scenery, girls and boys. On the other hand, the New Art Form consists of a story, songs, dances, scenery, girls and boys."

Would that we could say the same. The old musical comedy *Boys From Syracuse* consisted of jokes like:

> Dromio: Don't you miss home cooking?
> Antipholus: Yes, whenever possible.

The New Art Form *Boys From Syracuse* consists of jokes like:

> A courtesan named Chlamydia.

For all the theorizing about how audiences have greater expectations of coherent storytelling, character development, etc., in practice what it boils down to is a joke about chlamydia. The argument is always that, since the frothy musical comedies of the Thirties, the form has "matured." Content-wise, it hasn't: the jokes are as silly and unambitious as ever. All that's "matured" is the process: it now takes years to refine and hone a script to make sure the chlamydia gag goes in the best place. In some ways, the form is less "mature": Balanchine's two extended ballet sequences have been cut, and the best that Ashford has to offer is some Vegas-style leg moves for the gals. Indeed, such energy as Scott Ellis has seems to have been lavished on the courtesans: the interpolation of two numbers—the obscure "A Lady Must Live" and the standard "You Took Advantage Of Me"—as feature spots for the ladies suggests a perverse preoccupation with servicing the working girls. Abbott, Rodgers, and Hart would be stunned to find the Roundabout so assiduously attempting to rouse the "tired businessman" in ways that were regarded as crass and clapped out in the mid-Twenties.

The pairs of pairs in this production are Jonathan Dokuchitz and Tom Hewitt as the long-lost twins Antipholus of Syracuse and Antipholus of Ephesus and Lee Wilkof and Chip Zien as their eternally lost manservants Dromio of Syracuse and Dromio of Ephesus. Silver specializes in jittery comic angst and his main contribution to *The Boys* is a kind of universal heterosexual dysfunction. In the original, Dromio of Eph. lived in fear of women; now the entire quartet does. Antipholus of Syracuse is wide-eyed with panic at finding the Amazonesque Adriana (Lauren Mitchell) on his hands. Antipholus of Ephesus spends the night at the bawdy house but nothing ensues. The four characters seem to blur into thin variations on the theme of male anxiety. I'm sure Silver could write a play on that subject, but it doesn't connect with the score and it isn't quite big enough for the songs, as Abbott's comedy and, for that matter, Shakespeare's is. Abbott shows always had great energy—"peppy" was his favorite word—but he was confident enough to know that, in the right situation, you could have all the energy you want just by standing still. He was never phonily manic, as so many wannabe farceurs are today. He also knew that a "musical farce," while not quite a contradiction in terms, is an exception to the rule: if you try to use songs in the "integrated" Rodgers and Hammerstein sense—to advance plot, illuminate character—it won't work. In *The Boys*, the love songs and the rhythm numbers and the ballets are a respite from the comedy; they give you a chance to catch your breath. The revisers' obsession with tonal consistency above all else misses the point: there's more than one way to tell a story.

So Nicky Silver has his moment: a scene with a gay tailor, changing rooms, slamming doors that delights the audience. But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it's *his* moment: it does nothing for the songs or the show and it leads nowhere. And, because of the basic mismatch between book and score, somehow everything gets out of whack. The performers can't find a coherent approach to singing and speaking, and the crude gear changes mean everyone winds up stepping on each other's toes. Even the vocal arrangements seem to be at war with the songs for most of the time. It's a very weird experience. Everyone arrives wanting to have a good time—they know the songs, they're looking forward to them—only to have a snide book, a listless staging, and malicious vocal arrangements suck all the life out of them. It's no comedy, all errors.

There is a lesson in this for all Broadway producers: the careless assumption that the Twenties and Thirties shows are brimming with great songs and all we need to do is bring in some hotshot playwright to write a new book is a false one. Sometimes it works, but more often it doesn't, because good musical-comedy writers are in far shorter supply than they were 'tween-wars.

Say what you like about the Aquila Theatre production of *The Comedy of Errors*, but it looks a lot more farcical than *The Boys*. It's set in a 1930s comic strip version of the late Ottoman Empire—think *Tintin*, or *The Road to Morocco*; fezzes galore, also belly dancers. Don't ask me what this has to do with Shakespeare but it does mean there's a lot more to look at than at the wallpapered *Syracuse*; in this show, the scenery dances. Everything's a lot more manic than at the musical: this is the kind of staging that would give Scott Ellis the bends. There's a lot of mugging, screaming, winking, leering, double takes, pratfalls, door-slamming and frantic gesticulating from the busy-busy principals—Mark Saturno as both Antipholi and Louis Butelli as the two Dromii.

Directed to the point of exhaustion by Robert Richmond, the seven actors press on through a noisy relentless cartoon of Shakespeare. This *Comedy* is full of sound and fury, but pathetically short of invention. It starts out flat-out zany, look-at-me whacky, and so there's nowhere to go. Twenty minutes in, you're sick of it—or, to be more accurate, I and the more subdued customers were. The whoops and hollers at every gesture encouraged from the louder members of the audience come to seem like a conspiracy between actors and theatergoers against the play. At a crucial moment, two modestly endowed principals compare breast sizes with a somewhat curvier courtesan, all this obscuring an important bit of text, for those of us square enough to be following the play. By this stage, though, the play is mostly left to putter on in the corner like a cable-news crawl. Yet again, you're reminded of Abbott's wisdom: that energy and pace are nothing to do with busyness. The unvarying bombardment of Richmond eventually becomes as faint and inert as Scott Ellis. In both cases, they strip the work of its power.

It was good enough for Shakespeare but not for Robert Richmond—the text, that is. So, though he's kept the Bard's lines, he has his actors put little buttons on the end of them—whoops and snorts and scats and neighing. Oddly enough, though the production spends most of its time trampling on the poetry, at the few moments it's allowed to shine through, the players handle Shakespeare rather better than most New York casts. Saturno, in particular, is far more effective as a straightforward speaker of Elizabethan verse than as a post-modern pantomime clown, making it all the more regrettable he's got to expend ninety percent of his talent on flaccid slapstick. This *Comedy of Errors* and the new *Boys From Syracuse* fail for the same reason: they don't trust the material. Fair enough. But, in that case, why do it? It was good enough for Shakespeare, good enough for George Abbott, and that makes it more than good enough for any of the available adaptors.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art

"Don't draw the bug!"

by Martin Greenberg

Kafka is a great surprise, but one we have gotten used to. The surprise is that an obscure writer from Central Europe who published little during his lifetime and never finished his most ambitious works, the three novels; a difficult avant-garde writer who thought the publisher Kurt Wolff had no business sense because he wanted to publish him; a Prague Jew educated in German culture, not interested in Judaism but intensely interested in his own Jewishness, which he didn't like, which embarrassed him because like most Western Jews (or anyhow Western European Jews) he felt its gypsylike, pariah ignominiousness (not to speak of worse) in the world's (i.e., gentile) eyes; a writer in German who felt that the language that he wrote so well belonged to Germans, not to him—the surprise is that such a one should have become the world writer of the twentieth century. What is a world writer? I wouldn't try to define it, but I can point a finger: Cervantes (though publishing his great opus in the seventeenth century) was the world writer of the eighteenth; Goethe (of *Faust Part I*, not *II*) of the nineteenth; before the eighteenth century, I suppose, Virgil.

"World writer" is different from (not necessarily better than) universal writer. Kleist, Joyce, Proust, Mark Twain, T. S. Eliot, Faulkner, many others—their works possess universality, but they aren't world writers. You need to make some kind of effort, especially when they aren't native to you, to grasp them. World writers grasp you. The man changed into a bug (Gregor Samsa), the accused man (Joseph K.)—they get into your head willy-nilly (as did Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Faust and Gretchen). You don't even have to read *The Metamorphosis* or *The Trial* for that to happen; you hardly have to have heard about Kafka to understand the adjective *kafkaesque*. The bug, the accused man, are images, the name Kafka itself has become an image, which I once called on two lines by Yeats (about Maud Gonne) to describe:

> Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind
> And took a mess of shadows for its meat.

There was more, however, to Kafka than hollow cheek and a diet of shadows.

Kafka's images were of the mind at first, and then, more purely, of the soul—but there was always soul in the Kafka psychology, against which he nevertheless exclaimed, in one of the aphorisms he wrote out and numbered in 1920: "That's it, no more psychology!" Images of the *psyche*, of the *soul*. *Not* graven images. Which is why the Kafka exhibition[1]—mostly made up of installations—at the Jewish Museum in

1 *The City of K.—Franz Kafka and Prague* was organized by the Centre de Cultura Contemporària de Barcelona. It is on view at the Jewish Museum from August 11, 2002 to January 5, 2003.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New York, entitled *The City of K.—Franz Kafka and Prague* is wrong from the start. You don't *install* Kafka, try to turn his inwardness into things. The movie made of *The Trial* long ago, all shadows, was a helpless, pretentious thing, Tony Perkins as K., a silly thing.

The exhibition about Kafka and Prague is also shadows, pretentiousness, and as a whole (not in all its parts) ludicrous. One can forgive pretentiousness, up to a point. It's hard to write about Kafka without sounding pretentious sometimes (I confess). How ordinary, how mean his subjects mostly are. Edwin Muir in his sonnet on Kafka calls him the "sad champion of the drab and half"; and yet stretching away behind the drab ordinariness, what vistas of suggestion of life-and-death meanings, of a threatening-promising spiritual world surrounding the banal dailiness, which, when you try to approach it as a critic, what pitfalls of pretentiousness open at your feet!

You pass through the doors into the Jewish Museum's exhibition to find a dimly lit interior made dimmer by black walls, on one of which, projected in slightly blurry letters of light, is *Kafka in Prague*. This is Part One of the show and is subtitled "Existential Space." My heart sank. When is space not existential? Or when is it "existential"? Part One's first section is entitled "The Primal Scene"—which means childhood. My heart sank again. On a long blank wall there are genealogical tables of both sides of Kafka's family. At one end of this long stretch of "existential" space is a large projected photograph of his powerful-looking father, butcher's son and ex-sergeant, sticking out aggressively at right angles, and at the other end a sad faced five-year-old Franz, flat against the wall, photographed before a photo-studio cloth lamb. ("I get it," I said to myself.)

Running alongside the wall between father and child is a showcase filled with black rubble in which photographs of Prague buildings are planted: Kafka's natal house, the ancient Altneu Synagogue with its striking steep-pitched, tooth-edged roof; the old Prague Jewish quarter (once ghetto) before it was demolished, etc., etc. The ominous black rubble is everywhere in the exhibition, piled into a waist-high mound when it arrives at Kafka's death.

Part One of the exhibit is more or less an account of Kafka's life in Prague: the narrow circle of family (a lot of family!) and job; the insurance company official going home (the family home—he didn't move out until he was thirty-one) to write; the Yiddish theater from Eastern Europe where Kafka, enchanted, found a Jewishness he thought was unselfconscious and unashamed; the high intellectual life of the Fanta salon where he occasionally visited; the fiancées he could never get himself to marry; the lovely Milena Jesenka whose few letters about him to Max Brod (not shown) are vivid with detail and passionate understanding; the Zionist Dora Dymant with whom he found some peace at the very end of his life. And, throughout, one Kafka quotation follows another on the black walls, very portentously, rather oppressively after a while.

The glass cases showing first editions of Kafka's books, title pages, his clear handwriting, photographs and books of friends, a stab at showing intellectual influences (stretching things, an old copy of Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*)—all this is interesting, how could it not be? But it is better suited to a library. The museum part, however, the installations which *are* the exhibition—they are embarrassingly silly, embarrassingly literal-minded. Prague is represented by a film montage of streets and traffic and buildings in which hazy, jumbled images waver and slide, topple and vanish, swell diseasedly and contract grotesquely. In this way, the catalogue says, we are "adapting ourselves to [Kafka's] sensory range and cognitive register." But Kafka's own register of his senses and mind, his prose, is clear, undistorted, classical. Strange things happen in his stories, but he's not an amusement park.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kafka got engaged to Felice Bauer twice and twice broke off the engagement. This episode is represented by a well-known photograph of the pair projected onto material stretched horizontally at sides and corners by cords and looking exactly like a little trampoline. As you watch, Kafka's image slowly begins to fade and disappear. What curatorial imagination! With Part Two of the show, "Imaginary Topography," you pass from the man to the work. Much is made of the story "The Burrow," represented strangely as a lattice-work maze which you walk through reading off quotations from the story painted on the installation's slats. Now as it happens the narrator of "The Burrow" is an animal not otherwise specified that burrows in the earth, not a creature that builds in wood. What was the curator thinking? The German word for "burrow" also means "construction." Did he think that that gave him leave to construct a cute little maze of wood that hardly suggests a winding underground tunnel, through which you walk in some astonishment, without interest?

The installation for *The Trial* is a long corridor of file cabinets with phones on the wall; invited by an attendant to pick up one, you hear a hoarse voice reciting in English a passage from the novel. A room made of mirrors that becomes white as snow is devoted to *The Castle*; on the far wall there is a vague streaming which becomes a vaguely sketched castle, a vague cloaked figure is seen plodding through vague snow toward it, *West West* floats on the screen, etc., etc.

Interestingly, nothing is done with *The Metamorphosis*. Is it because Kafka told Kurt Wolff (I paraphrase): "Don't draw the bug!"? But this is just the trouble with the show; it tries to draw the bug.

The catalogue speaks of the "distortion of space and time" in Kafka and his world. Behind this belief is an old romantic conception of Prague as a city of magic, mystics, alchemists, kabbalists, wonder rabbis, golems, and Kafka its heir as a teller of "fantasy tales." When I went to Prague a long time ago, I found a drab, somewhat decayed city with a lot of depressed-looking people filling the streets; men in short-sleeved white shirts carrying briefcases in which (I had learned in Yugoslavia) they carried their lunch of bread and salami; the big, stolid street cars shambling along like heavily built European charwomen; a pervading grayness in the midst of which shone the wonderful gothic and baroque churches, bridges, houses. Communist rule then had a lot to do with the depressed faces and dilapidation. But the drabness, the awful drabness, is just what you find in Kafka's stories long before Communism. "The Judgment," *The Metamorphosis*, *The Trial*, so many of the little stories about businessmen and bachelors—so realistic, so drab. *The Castle*, too, has its drabness, but mixed with it is an aura. Kafka the realist is as unglamorous as a Prague streetcar. The "unreal" things that happen in his stories are psychologically and spiritually real—as Coleridge wrote, "Reality's dark dream!"

Behind the exhibition, for all the pretentious language of the catalogue and wall commentary, are simple, long-standing ideas of Kafka and his work. There is the simple idea of him as someone neurotically stuck, someone "disabled" (Edmund Wilson). Thrown on a black wall in letters of light is a well-known Kafka quotation from his youth: "Prague doesn't let us go. . . . This old crone has claws. One has to yield or else . . ." Helplessness. But when no longer a youth, he wrote: "It's the old joke: we hold on tight to the world and complain it's holding on to us." Helplessness understood.

The unsimple confrontation in "In the Penal Colony" between a wickedly cruel, sadistic, but profoundly spiritual Old Regime, and a morally superior but shallow, humanitarian New Regime (with its own kind of cruelty) is absent in the installation for that story, for which all is simply torture, especially modern punishment, on which the catalogue quotes some jargon from Foucault.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kafka was caught, a wall commentary blazons, in the conflict between vocation and profession (writer and bureaucratic official) in the modern world. A victim. Joseph K. is harassed to death in *The Trial* by the court's bureaucratic (in)justice. A victim. Which indeed he is. But the matter is more complicated. It is possible to understand the court as Joseph K.'s own conscience, a conscience alienated from him so that it appears—and is—external, set over him, objective. The fallen world with its great machinery of oppression is only man alienated from himself. This is *The Trial*'s big joke: What K. thinks is being done to him, he's doing to himself. As a Kafka aphorism goes:

> The original sin, the ancient wrong committed by man, consists in the complaint, which man never ceases making, that a wrong has been done to him, that the original sin was once committed on him.

This isn't a disabled man speaking.

One last thing. Kafka's life, not unusually, was full of sorrows, but he wasn't just a man of sorrows, he had a comic genius. This was recognized early. There is nothing of the Kafka comedy in the show. When he read *The Trial* to friends, Max Brod reported, he and they would often burst out laughing. "The Bucket Rider," about the 1917 coal shortage, sings like a poem in German extraordinarily beautiful—it's a jewel of charming (Kafka charming!) humor.

Johannes Urzidil, a friend, tells the story of his father-in-law running into Kafka on the street just after the publication of *The Metamorphosis* and Kafka's saying: "What do you think about the awful things that have been happening in our house?"

We mourn the passing of Andrew Forge

1923–2002

A valued contributor to The New Criterion

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gallery chronicle

by Daniel Kunitz

Apostate from abstraction; doubter of heroic "American-type" painting in the fifties and sixties; anti-progressivist champion of underdog artists from André Derain and Balthus to Jean Hélion and Alberto Giacometti: the American painter Leland Bell (1922–1991) was a natural dissenter from prevailing trends, a heretic in the face of aesthetic orthodoxies. Like his favored artists, Bell was something of an unclassifiable maverick, and, not one to seek the spotlight, his work has suffered from comparative neglect. Never formally trained, he studied with Karl Knaths in his native Washington, D.C. In the mid-forties in New York City, he painted abstractions and was associated with the Jane Street Gallery and such artists as Nell Blaine, Albert Kresch, Robert De Niro, and his future wife, the Iceland-born artist Louisa Mattiasdottir—though none of his work from this period survives. An outstanding selection of the work that does survive, self-portraits and figure compositions from the fifties until his untimely death by stroke in the early nineties, a show called "Changing Rhythms" which included almost thirty canvases, was on view at the Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, the last stop on a year-long tour of university galleries.[2]

Though the show's well-turned and thoughtful catalogue essays make much of his shore-side disdain for mainstream artistic movements, it is possible now, with hindsight, to link Bell's concerns with those of a disparate group of post-war artists who, like de Kooning and Diebenkorn, sought by various pictorial means to unify representational painting with the lessons of non-objective abstraction. "I would love," said Bell, "to have a structure as powerful and human and deeply probing as Mondrian's, but I also want to invent something that will accommodate the appearance of things." The most common route to such an accommodation has been landscape-based abstraction; Bell used the human form as his motif, creating flat, rhythmic, figural compositions that foreground the tension between line and color. Before arriving at this mature style, however, he took up, in the fifties, the discipline of portraiture.

Apparently, Derain's *Self-Portrait With Pipe* (c. 1953) inspired Bell's exploration of his own visage. Salander hung seven of those remarkably accomplished efforts and one related drawing. Looking at them, one couldn't escape noticing how much the two men resembled each other: both had heavy jowls, lined faces, sunken eyes, and a weary expression. Bell attempted to copy the Derain, finding that "drawing it was like trying to draw my own head." Not included in the show, the earliest of those self-portraits employs textured passages of oil in a fairly straightforward realist vein. By the time of *Self-Portrait I* (1976), the contours and planar

1 "Changing Rhythms: Works by Leland Bell, 1950s-1991," was on view at Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, New York from September 5 to September 28, 2002.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

edges of the artist's face have been defined by thick lines of black paint, kohl-like around the eyes, so that the whole resembles one of the Egyptian Fayum portraits he admired. Even in the late drawing *Self-Portrait II* (1982), heavy charcoal delimits rubbed passages and lightly penciled contours. For the most part, Bell painted the self-portraits in oil, with fluid, gestural brushstrokes and tonally harmonizing, naturalistic colors.

For the large figure compositions, however, Bell applied acrylics in broad, flat planes, with strong black edging lines derived from Fernand Léger, and expressive rather than mimetic colors. These later works repeat a limited number of compositional schema—frequently depicting himself, his wife, and his daughter, the artist Temma Bell—which the artist tweaked from one incarnation to another, inching toward his ideal of "purity." It seems he established the compositional structures with studies in the slower-drying medium of oil: in *Butterfly Group* (1968), a small work in oil on board, a central female figure stands with arms outflung in front of a low, tan table; to her right a male figure raises his left arm at a right angle, rhyming with the central figure's bent left arm; while in front of her another female figure stoops parallel to the table, her bent arms forming two concentric arcs. At this point, the figures lack facial details, and their bodies remain imprecisely rendered. The compositional tactic, capturing figures in an instant of gesticulation, Bell learned from Balthus. Martica Sawin succinctly characterizes it as "the incident, the intrusion of a butterfly or a cat with a dead bird into a domestic scene that becomes the catalyst for a flurry of reactions." The Butterfly Groups relate to Balthus's *Phalène* (The Moth), wherein a nude girl steps toward a lamp, her right arm lifted toward it. A more recent version, *Butterfly Group* (1986–90), a nearly ten-foot long rectangular canvas in acrylic, pictures the same group, here clearly identifiable as the artist and his family, responding to a butterfly in the work's upper left corner. On the left, nearest the insect, Bell, positioned behind a long table and holding a white rag in his right hand, spreads his arms in a gesture of futility; in front of the table, and seated partially on it, Temma extends her arms in a sideways V; also behind the table, though to the extreme right, Louisa crooks her left arm and lifts her right, bent at a slightly oblique angle, pointing to the butterfly. Bell harnesses every means to structure the picture like an abstraction. It hints at shallow depths—for instance, in the foreshortened lines marking the table's width—yet its two-dimensional flatness is reinforced by the use of unmodulated, contrasting colors, instead of chiaroscuro, to suggest shadows and by the expansive planes of pigment that make up the background. The expressive colors themselves draw attention to the interlocking geometries of the whole.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of these late figure groups is their motile energy, the way they escape what in reproduction looks like an utterly static rendering. Bell was a jazz drummer before he started painting, and he had a masterly way of making shapes march in rhythm: corporeal positions rhyme and repeat, limbs frame repeated and relating negative-space shapes, colors pulse. The black lines that emphasize the shapes of figures and planes, but which also halt movement, end before the tips of pointing fingers, which are then left blurred in strong contrast to the hard edges that dominate the compositions. Often he exaggerates proportions—the length of an arm or torso—allowing a form to, as it were, extend along with the figure's movement. Even a seated portrait with no implied movement, such as *Temma in Orange Dress* (1975), is enlivened by rhythmic geometries and tonal contrasts. A parabolic arc beneath the chair mimics the curve of its arm as well as Temma's akimbo arms, the curves of her knees, and the folds of her dress; all of these arcs play off the hard angles of the chair legs and the walls behind them. Chromatically, the painting is structured on the contrast of orange and green, with the former modulating into browns, tans, and ochers, and the green of the chair's fabric setting off a strip of blue in the wall to the right.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Almost everything written about Bell trumpets his contrariness, his skewed relation to post-war Modernism, but one might argue that it is our construing of recent art history that sets him askew. The self-conscious attempt to reconcile abstraction and figuration has a notable history of its own.

Just how far Bell succeeded in his aims—and the proof is in the magnificent pictures—is highlighted by comparison with the recent paintings by the German artist Georg Baselitz on view at PaceWildenstein's Chelsea gallery.[2] "Georg Baselitz: New Paintings" brings together fourteen works in oil on canvas, six of them in a tondo format, the others on large rectangular canvases. The German, younger than Bell by more than a decade, famously presents his figurative works upside down, an obvious bid to accent the abstract nature of his images. Indeed, in the catalogue, Rudi Fuchs recounts a conversation with Baselitz, from 1979, in which the painter insisted that his motifs had no significance as content. "He had," writes Fuchs, "no interest in figurative painting; he liked to see himself, if not as an abstract artist of sorts, then as a practitioner of pure painting." His rhetoric of purity and impatience with the distinction between abstraction and figuration harkens back to Bell's descriptions of his project; his methods and achievement, however, could not be more different.

Ill-conceived and possessed of more bravado than substance, the Neo-Expressionism of artists like Baselitz has not produced many praiseworthy paintings, though unlike, say, Julian Schnabel or even Sandro Chia, Baselitz has always professed a concern for formal pictorial structure. Unfortunately, the works at Pace reconfirmed the sense that he maintains only a superficial interest in all but the "look" of his paintings. Even Fuchs notes that "Baselitz has always been nervously sensitive to what was going on around him in art"—an attitude toward novelty that certainly distinguishes his public concerns from the independence and historical-mindedness of a Leland Bell. It seems that Baselitz painted many of these new works, given their specific dates, in a single day.

I don't know what the tondo adds to these pictures beyond unfamiliar packaging: Baselitz doesn't exploit the circle compositionally; he centers his figures and discovers no purpose other than framing for the edge of the support. Characteristically, his marks are messy and expressive, meant to convey passion rather than form, athough passion for what remains unclear—certainly not for the paint he thinly applies in dry, stingy daubs, drips, and blots. The four women in *Vor Dem Tanz* (August 17, 2001), related solely by additive composition, are loosely outlined in diluted black paint and given the faintest of coloring by violet, green, yellow, and blue applied almost like a wash. Above them, at their feet, a dilute black area with negative white dots—an homage, one supposes, to his compatriot Sigmar Polke—occupies the circle's top half. Had the format some structural exigency, the repetition of the circles within the larger tondo might have set up a rhythmic tension, but the shapes here seem as unrelated as the figures, which, of course, are placed upside down in order to stress the abstract nature of their forms. Still, the figures barely have a form, and the colors appear only as decorative embellishments—they provide no compositional scaffolding. When he deigns to draw faces, they tend to be cartoonish, as with the caricatured policemen in *Blumen für die Sieger* (August 2001) or the garishly smiling mouth on a long-haired man in *Brief von der Front* (December 19, 2001). In all, the preening way Baselitz handles paint manages only to call attention to its own inept parroting of emotional volume.

A full-page black-and-white photograph of Baselitz fronts the catalogue essay: the smirking, stylishly clad artist looks out; a thin line of facial hair, a soul patch, bisects his chin. If each of the paintings in this all-too-cool show featured even one such interesting detail, it might have been lukewarm.

2 "Georg Baselitz: New Paintings" opened at PaceWildenstein, New York on September 6 and remains on view until October 5, 2002.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Music

Clever, entertaining, romantic

by Jay Nordlinger

What's the lowliest form of classical music? (Bear in mind that "classical music" is an almost infinitely flexible term—probably too flexible. It encompasses both the Bach B-Minor Mass and Khachaturian's Sabre Dance.) Many would say that operetta is the lowliest form. But then, some people aren't too sure about opera itself: it's all slumming, they say, a tawdry world of passions, costumes, and make-up. *Don Giovanni*, *Fidelio*, and *Parsifal*? Exceptions, perhaps!

"Operetta," in its most literal sense, means "little opera." But, of course, we're not talking about Ravel's *Enfant et les sortilèges*, and certainly not about Strauss's *Elektra*. No, we mean far more Johann Strauss than Richard Strauss. In fact, as a music dictionary will tell you, "operetta" has come to be synonymous with "light opera." There are undoubtedly very high examples of light opera. Anyone in his right mind would kill to have written Lehár's *Merry Widow*, a beautiful, inspired little creation (never mind Hitler's great attachment to it). *Die Fledermaus*, by Johann Strauss, Jr., is another very high operetta, a staple of the operatic repertory generally, or an operetta token in it, if you will.

Over the years, many of our greatest singers have indulged in the guilty pleasure of operetta. More than a few have done so unguiltily! One of the great Schwarzkopf's most accomplished recordings is her album of operetta arias, including Richard Heuberger's "Im *chambre séparée*," from *Der Opernball*. Anyone who can resist that can resist anything. (The album is available from EMI Classics as a Great Recording of the Century.) The tenor Richard Tauber was the undisputed King of Operetta in the time roughly between the wars; he was a considerable singer by any measure. Ever since him, tenors of every stripe have loved to open their mouths in "Dein ist mein ganzes Herz!" (or "My Heart Belongs to You!") from Lehár's *Land of Smiles*.

Well, operetta is now making a bit of a comeback; or, at least, Decca Broadway has reissued recordings of eight operettas, recordings made in the 1940s and '50s. These discs—which contain two operettas each—feature some familiar, well-loved works, like Sigmund Romberg's *Student Prince*, and some less familiar ones, too, such as Jerome Kern's *Roberta*. (This is the operetta that boasts "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes." Furthermore, the name Kern brings up the kinship between operetta—certainly "Broadway operetta," as opposed to the pure, Viennese variety—and the traditional musical. The operetta, of course, was to lose out badly to the musical.) The Decca discs offer not the complete operettas, but highlights—which, not to be unpleasant about it, amply suffice. A note from the company says, "America in the 21st century seems to have little time for operetta, the ultimate musical confection." True. But let's make a little time.

One of the discs is devoted entirely to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Romberg, namely, his operettas *The Desert Song* and *The New Moon*. As Eric Myers reminds us in his excellent liner notes, the former work was accorded no fewer than three film versions, in 1929, 1943, and 1953. It was revived on Broadway in 1973, though unsuccessfully, and was given the royal treatment at the New York City Opera in the 1980s—there, it was a hit.

The star of the Decca recording is Kitty Carlisle, whose career has been long and varied. The senior-most of our senior citizens know her as a singer-actress from Broadway and movies; the subsequent generation or two know her as a regular on television's *To Tell the Truth*, where she was a panelist from 1956 to 1977; and New Yorkers of any age may remember her as head of the state's arts council from 1976 to 1996. Kitty Carlisle—Kitty Carlisle Hart, really, the wife of the playwright/director Moss Hart—was born in 1910, and I happened to see her at a party not long ago. She looked almost exactly as she did on television in the 1970s. Someone remarked to me, "Do you realize that this lady dated George Gershwin?"

In *The Desert Song*, she makes pretty and sturdy sounds, and she articulates with exceptional clarity. Her co-star is Wilbur Evans, a classic operetta baritone, romantic and virile. Romberg's music is unquestionably nostalgic, but slightly hard to take in large doses. It needs to be laughed with (when laughter is called for), and not laughed at. It needs to be accepted, without sneering or groans. One must have the tastebud for this "confection." Sings Mrs. Hart, "When life is gray, I know a way to keep it gay. I pass the time of day romancing." That's the spirit.

The New Moon, as Eric Myers informs us, was Romberg's final hit. (The plots of these shows tend to be so byzantine and zany, one can scarcely get into them.) It contains one very familiar song, "Stouthearted Men," which is sometimes mistaken for a Gilbert and Sullivan number. (An endearing line: "Start me with ten who are stronghearted men, and I'll soon give you ten thousand more." The lyrics are by Oscar Hammerstein II, who was co-lyricist on *The Desert Song*. He was to move on to much greater things, chiefly with his partner Richard Rodgers.) Thomas Hayward is the dreamy tenor here, and Lee Sweetland—a wonderful name for an operetta singer—is the dreamy baritone. It may be said that listening to Romberg at length increases one's regard for the masters of opera proper, even the "low" variety: Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, in comparison to *The Desert Song*, is a late Beethoven quartet.

Better music is to be found in the works of Victor Herbert, that American original and one-time first cellist with the Metropolitan Opera. His CD from Decca features two of his best, *Babes in Toyland* and *The Red Mill*. The conductor on *Babes* is Alexander Smallens, of properly "classical" fame. It should be said straight off that Herbert's March from this operetta is one of the great, truly distinguished little marches, not dissimilar to Gounod's Funeral March of a Marionette. Many years ago, Eugene Ormandy included it on an album of marches with the Philadelphia Orchestra. And the title song lingers in many a memory: "Toyland, Toyland, little girl and boy land . . . childhood's joyland, mystic, merry Toyland." The tenor Kenny Baker sings this, and other songs, with fond tenderness.

Three years after *Babes* (1903) came *The Red Mill*, lyrics by Henry Blossom—another name made for operetta! *The Red Mill* may be largely forgotten now—Herbert is far better known for *Babes* and, even more, *Naughty Marietta*—but Eric Myers records that it was the composer's "biggest success." He further notes that "with its satirical, Americans-abroad plot and its abundance of Tin Pan Alley-style songs, *The Red Mill* was actually closer to the nascent form of musical comedy than to operetta."

Of chief interest on this recording is the participation of Eileen Farrell, the . . . what should we call her? "Singer" will do. She was one of the most versatile and unusual singers in history, a natural, unfettered soprano who didn't care whether she sang

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an advertising jingle or Isolde—and who did them both superbly. Her way with Herbert is typically winning. One is struck by how controlled and modulated she is; she had a very substantial instrument, yet she could lighten it at will. And she never sings down to the music—she treats it all with dignity, and appropriateness. I think of Arthur Fiedler's line: "There's no second-rate music, only second-rate performances." That's debatable, at a minimum, but the line is nice.

Decca is not the only company having a little fun. Video Artists International is an invaluable purveyor of historic CDs, videocassettes, and DVDs. The company has in its stockroom two shows—on video—from Max Liebman, the legendary producer. They were both live on television, and come from 1955. They are Herbert's *Naughty Marietta* and a concoction called *The Great Waltz*, a life of Johann Strauss, Jr., with that composer's music (drawn from a variety of sources).

Each of these productions is hard to resist; it would take a heart of stone not to enjoy them. Introducing *The Great Waltz*, the announcer (who is Don Pardo: *the* announcer) says, "The place? Vienna. The time? Three-quarter!" All the songs are performed in English—it is imperative in operetta that the songs be rendered in the language of the audience—and the production is definitely live. Proof comes in the few flubbed lines and a glitch in the camera work. This is the sort of music around which it's hard to be sad. Indeed, operetta music, generally, is happy music. The Gershwin song that either mocks or pays tribute to this genre—"By Strauss!"—is giddily happy. ("So I say to cha-cha-cha, *Heraus!* Just give me an oom-pah-pah by Strauss!")

In *The Great Waltz*, Johann, Jr., is a young composer trying to emerge from his father's shadow, and his father is trying to subvert him at every turn. If this is not roughly accurate, Johann Strauss the Elder has been seriously libeled. Eventually, however, the father softens, and the Younger is able to prove himself the far greater composer. The star here is Patrice Munsel, a coloratura/lyric soprano who was on the roster of the Met. It's easy to see why she was chosen for this "light" work: she's a charming actress, an effervescent personality, and a sport. Though she may be "slumming," she doesn't act like it, or sing like it. Munsel is guileless and winsome, with a pure, flexible, often quicksilver voice.

Joining her is a more noted soprano, Jarmila Novotna, who is clearly having a ball in Liebman's production, cavorting and conspiring in her Czech accent. Keith Andes—known as a movie and TV character actor—does a solid job as Strauss, and Bert Lahr does a brilliant turn as Hans Ebesteder, the café owner. It matters not that Lahr is supposed to be a solid Viennese citizen: his New York accent remains as thick as ever. And he talks his way magnificently through a novelty song about his character's dislike of the waltz—a Viennese who can't stand the waltz! ("The house is filled with Strauss!" he grouses.)

It is perhaps of further interest that one of the writers responsible for the "book" was Neil Simon. Munsel, Novotna, Lahr, Simon, Pardo: Liebman could produce 'em.

And he did smashingly with *Naughty Marietta*, the blue-ribbon winner in this bumper crop of operettas, for my money. This is a crackling show, gloriously performed. We are in French-ruled New Orleans, just after the Americans have won their independence. As the announcer says, "The Old City was a cauldron of intrigue, hot tempers, cold steel, and fiery passions, which can only lead to one thing . . . Operetta!" Indeed.

This production married an opera star—Munsel again—and a Broadway star, Alfred Drake, the baritone known for *Oklahoma!*'s Curly and many other roles. *Naughty Marietta* has practically everything: singing, dancing, dueling (complete with nonstop repartée)—even a Punch 'n' Judy show. It is packed with gaiety and sauciness. Munsel is an unalloyed delight, sporting a French ac-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cent that actually grows on you rather than wears on you. Drake is as fresh as a daisy, his singing polished and easy, his manner effortless and appealing. John Conte is the handsome villain, and Gale Sherwood is melting as Yvonne, the (basically) good girl who loves the villain. This is a beautiful woman, a beautiful singer, and a compelling presence. For many years, Sherwood was Nelson Eddy's partner, though not nearly as well known as Jeanette MacDonald.

We should know two songs from *Naughty Marietta*. The first is the "Italian Street Song," a coloratura romp, with plentiful high C's. Beverly Sills liked to sing this number, and recorded it (as part of an entire album of Herbert). Munsel glitters and dazzles in it. The second song is the show's concluding number, "Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life"—and it's possible that, at this date, the phrase is more famous than the song. *Naughty* is, in a nutshell, sincere fun. I mentioned earlier that anyone should kill to have written *The Merry Widow*; one might at least commit battery to have written *Naughty Marietta*.

What can we say of the genre—of the poor, discarded operetta? That it is clever, entertaining, romantic, and often ingenious. It is not necessarily to be gorged on, even as meringue isn't. One can go a long while—years—without hearing any operetta, and not notice any dissatisfaction. But forever? Are you kidding? Excuse me, but I must go and find *The Land of Smiles*.

Concert notes

The 2002 Season at the
Tanglewood Music Center,
Lenox, Massachusetts

by Patrick J. Smith

Tanglewood, in western Massachusetts, has long been known as the summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and it has been the model for a number of other summer musical performance sites around the country. Yet, though thousands continue to gather in the cavernous Koussevitzky Music Shed and on the spacious lawns outside for weekend concerts by the Boston Symphony (and, occasionally, other orchestras), the concert life is only one part of the Tanglewood experience, and increasingly—despite the numbers—a less critically important one.

The teaching aspect of Tanglewood was present from the beginning, thanks to the ideas and influence of Serge Koussevitzky, conductor of the orchestra at the time the Boston Symphony decided to perform summers in Tanglewood. Teaching another generation of performers and composers was, to Koussevitzky, an obligation, not a privilege. In the long history of the Symphony, two specifics stand out: the emergence of Leonard Bernstein as both composer and conductor, and the first American performance of Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes* (conducted by Bernstein), which was a Koussevitzky commission. This last inaugurated the years of Boris Goldovsky's opera group at Tanglewood, which was—with the later establishment of the Santa Fe Opera—instrumental in both training young American singers and establishing summer opera as a viable cultural attraction.

In addition to the training of young players, singers, and composers, there has always been an emphasis on new music, thanks to the continuing support of the Chicago wine merchant Paul Fromm, and the early August Fromm Week was a focus for some of the more daring departures in contemporary composition. Since Fromm's death, his Foundation has continued to support the endeavor. In addition, this year saw the inauguration of the New Fromm Players, a small group of distinguished alumni of the Tanglewood Music Center who will concentrate in new works by students and faculty.

The pedagogical side of Tanglewood became especially newsworthy a few years ago when the Boston Symphony's Music Direc-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tor, Seiji Ozawa, decided to take direct charge of the program and to reintegrate members of the orchestra into the teaching. This led to some resignations—and to an inordinate amount of publicity—but today the transition runs smoothly. About half the members of the orchestra take part in some aspect of the teaching process, which involves auditions of applicants throughout the United States. Orchestra members travel to up to eight cities for these auditions. From an application pool of 1500, each summer about 150 students are chosen, of which about one hundred are in the orchestra, with eight composers, four to eight conductors, twenty-five to thirty singers, and several pianists, with the average age at about twenty-four.

The programs of the Tanglewood Music Center, both public and private, are under the director Ellen Highstein and her staff, and they form one part of the overall Tanglewood summer season, which includes the Shed concerts (by the Boston Symphony, various visiting orchestras, and the Boston Pops), as well as recitals and programs during the week by visiting soloists and chamber groups.

This last expansion of the Tanglewood season has been made possible by the construction and opening (in 1996) of Seiji Ozawa Hall, an eleven-hundred-seat facility (with a back opening for lawn occupants) in the general shoebox shape of Symphony Hall in Boston. Many listeners prefer the intimacy of Ozawa Hall to the Shed, and the Ozawa Hall offerings have developed a loyal audience. The year-round nature of music performance in New York (including the Mostly Mozart concerts) has also allowed Tanglewood to piggyback on soloists and groups that would normally not be available for touring to western Massachusetts in the summer, and this has given those programs a welcome variety.

The construction of Seiji Ozawa Hall has therefore not only moved the Tanglewood "campus" eastward—away from the Shed, the formal gardens, and the Theatre—but in its continual emphasis on differing types of music (contemporary and Baroque; solo, chamber, and chamber orchestra) fundamentally altered the season, making it more of a festival as well as an extensive teaching facility. This multifarious activity is expected to continue with the arrival, in 2004, of the newly appointed Music Director, James Levine.

Highstein stresses that the Music Center process is less one of competitiveness than of collaborative music-making, with the teaching representing the best in the profession at the highest level. Although she says that the training is not aimed towards auditions for future jobs, there is no doubt that the opportunity for the students to be heard by members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra is a factor in the process.

Highstein has also shifted the emphasis in the training of the young composers. Instead of a composer-in-residence situation, where the composer is left to write his/her own music while receiving instruction, the composer is integrated into the general teaching schedule. Thus, young composers are given specialized projects, such as writing music for films (with John Williams as instructor) or music for choruses (with John Oliver, the director of the excellent Tanglewood Festival Chorus). Composition, therefore, becomes central to the curriculum, rather than marginalized, and young composers are often able to provide music for ancillary Berkshire area events, such as the Shakespeare Theatre or Jacob's Pillow.

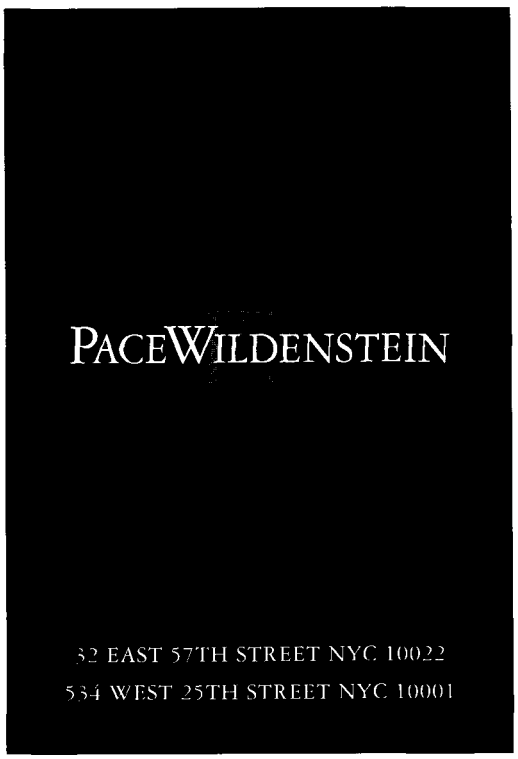
This year's Festival of Contemporary Music was under the direction of the composer Bright Sheng, and he decided that the works performed would be exclusively by American composers. A large number of works of all kinds was performed during the week, by older and younger American composers alike, but the big orchestral concert on July 24 by the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra that I attended was compositionally a rather dispiriting affair. The music played showed plenty of craft and imagination, but also plenty of an empty

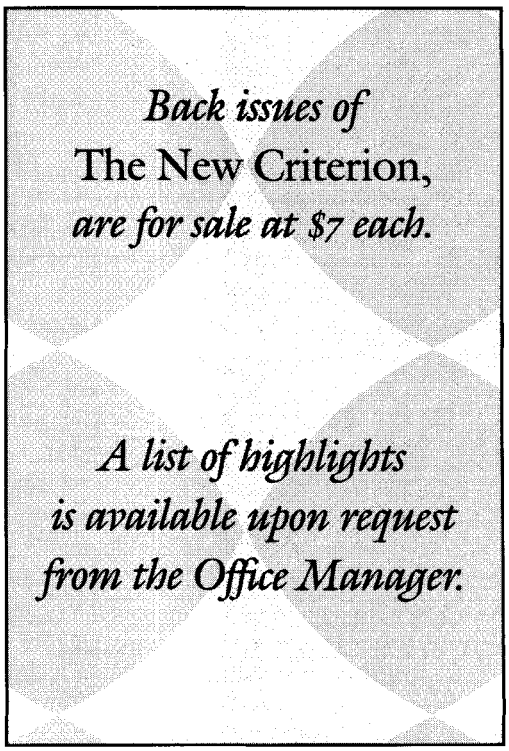
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pretentiousness, and a preening self-indulgence. The strongest piece was the oldest: the late composer Stephen Albert's elegiac setting of portions of the final monologue from Joyce's *Ulysses* entitled *Flower of the Mountain*.

The voice aspect of the Music Center has for years been in the hands of the legendary teacher Phyllis Curtin, who this summer was feted on her eightieth birthday. The quality of her students was demonstrated in a double bill of works given minimal staging in Ozawa Hall—Stravinsky's *Renard* and Satie's *Socrate*. If the decision to parse the tenor monologues that make up the Satie work for a group of women's voices (and a male Socrates) is only understandable in pedagogical terms—to have more students perform—the evening was a success. Next year, the Center has taken the unusual (for them) step of co-commissioning two one-act operas, by Osvaldo Golijov and Robert Zuidam, for performances in the Theatre.

With the continued growth of the population in the Berkshire area (which extends as far west as Albany) and the increasing number of people residing in the Berkshires for the entire summer, an expansion of the Tanglewood program would seem to be a natural development. It is encouraging to see this development proceeding in several coordinated paths: that of the Shed concerts, the manifold activities of the Tanglewood Music Center, and the presentation of recitals, chamber music, and chamber orchestras. For those of us who rarely attend the parade of warhorses in the Shed, such a variety is welcome. And such a variety attests to the vitality of the organization as well, which in turn augurs positively for the arrival of the next Boston Symphony Music Director.




Back issues of
The New Criterion,
are for sale at $7 each.
A list of highlights
is available upon request
from the Office Manager.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The media

Debating Iraq

by James Bowman

If the United States goes to war with Iraq it may be the most debated and talked-about war in history. And if there is no war, it will *certainly* be the most debated and talked-about non-war in history. In the old days, of course, there were probably as many armchair strategists as there are today, but part of the charm of being able to second-guess the generals and the politicians was one's utter powerlessness to affect their decisions. It was like being a Monday-morning quarterback: the quarterback himself operated on a different plane of existence entirely. But nowadays, the second guessers, particularly those in the media, assume an easy equality with those whose behavior they have taken it upon themselves to criticize.

Some people think this a thoroughly good thing. Michael Kinsley, for instance, writes under the heading "Government by Op-Ed" from his own syndicated perch on *The Washington Post* op-ed page that

> "Disarray" is the approved label for the peculiar process by which this nation is deciding whether to go to war against Iraq. Enormous power has been vested in the editors of newspaper op-ed pages, who get to decide which former official of the previous Bush administration will get the next opportunity to remind the world that he is still alive. Bush du Jour lets his people squabble in public. All deplorably chaotic to the orderly minds of foreign policy land.
>
> But a better word than disarray might be democracy. In theory, at least, it's like a high-minded Jeffersonian dream that the national debate about war and peace should be framed by a series of essays penned by former government officials who have withdrawn to their farms, ranches, consulting firms and suchlike contemplative retreats.

True, Mr. Kinsley recognizes that "a bunch of turgid, self-regarding pronunciamientos, full of half-hidden agendas, possibly ghost-written though hardly by Thomas Jefferson's ghost, are not exactly the *Federalist Papers*." But he doesn't think this stylistic inadequacy interferes with what, in common with most of those in media land, he considers "the general desirability of vigorous debate." I'm not so sure. Would not even Jefferson have wished to preserve a pretty sharp distinction between disarray and democracy, particularly when it comes to matters of national security? Does the American version of democracy in any case mean that all citizens have an equal right to take part in such a "debate" concerning high matters of state, in particular whether or not, or when, or how, their country will go to war? Although the most extreme of democrats might argue that they do, even they would presumably have to find some way to make exceptions for malcontents, fifth-columnists, Islamic fundamentalists, and so forth.

The well-known words from Burke's address in 1774 to the electors of Bristol would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seem to have some relevance here: "Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion." Or, to put it the other way round, if our elected President continues to bring to bear upon the problem of war with Iraq his best judgment—as we must suppose he does—then wherefore all this fever of opinionizing? What have we elected him for, if we are to act as if we expect our views to be treated as being of equal weight with his? Of course we understand what Kinsley means by the "half-hidden agendas" of the first George Bush's now-retired (or semi-retired) advisers, but he neglects to mention the less-than-half-hidden agenda of the media in rushing with such alacrity to promote them.

That this latter agenda is anti-war—and pro-disarray—we can naturally take for granted, but it remains a matter of some interest just how far the media are willing to go in pursuing it. Would they, for instance, stop short of publishing classified information that might be of assistance to an enemy? The answer, as we discovered with the publication of what purported to be the administration's actual Iraqi invasion plan by *The New York Times* last summer, appears to be a resounding no. As the *Times* itself reported,

> Using information provided by a source familiar with the military planning and unhappy with its direction, the *Times* reported that military leaders envisioned an air-, land- and sea-based campaign against Iraq from the north, south and west. The article listed several countries that might be used as staging areas for the campaign but emphasized that none had been formally consulted about playing such a role and that the planning was preliminary. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, who has often complained about leaks, said in a memorandum to Pentagon officials on Tuesday that unauthorized disclosure of classified information could help terrorists and put American lives in jeopardy . . .

And what does the *Times* itself say to this grave charge?

> A spokesman for the *Times* said today that while the newspaper could not discuss the nature of its confidential sources, "we are satisfied that the article we printed on July 5 about contingency planning for action on Iraq was consistent with responsible citizenship."
>
> "We took appropriate steps to determine that while addressing matters of legitimate public concern, we were not jeopardizing current or prospective military operations," the spokesman said.

Interesting, isn't it, that the "spokesman" expects us to take on trust that the newspaper "took appropriate steps" to make sure that its disclosure of classified information was responsible—otherwise, why did he not spell out what those steps were, who took them, the evidence he gathered, and the reasoning by which he reached his conclusion?—while the whole point of the disclosure was that the paper itself takes nothing on trust from a democratically elected government? If the people's representatives say that it is dangerous that a piece of information should be made public, there is no question of accepting their claim without independent confirmation, whereas if the unelected and unrepresentative *New York Times* says that it is *not* dangerous we are expected to accept that claim implicitly.

But why should it come as any surprise that the media's self-righteousness reaches its pinnacle of perfection in the nation's "newspaper of record"? Nor is it surprising that the same newspaper should have waged a months-long campaign against war with Iraq, not only on the editorial and op-ed pages but with the assistance of such bogus "news" stories as James Dao's solemn assurance that "Experts Warn of High Risk for American Invasion of Iraq." Just fancy that! You decide to invade somebody and the next thing you know somebody's telling you there are *risks* involved. Who'd have thought it? And, warned Mr. Dao, though

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the experts were varied on their prescriptions for American policy in the region, "there was a broad consensus . . . that if President Bush decided to use military force to remove Mr. Hussein—as many in Congress expect—the Pentagon could not assume that the Iraqi military would collapse without a fight or that Iraqi opposition forces could carry on the fight alone."

Another surprise! Who—who at *The New York Times*, anyway—would start a war unless he assumed that the enemy would collapse without a fight? The "report" actually speaks volumes not about the war or the "experts" but about the intellectual culture of *The New York Times* itself and the kind of vaguely "progressive" and pacifistic views on which it bases its allegedly weighty opinions about matters of war and peace and international relations. Including the *Times* in that much ballyhooed "debate" over American policy toward Iraq turns out to be like inviting Noam Chomsky to join the cabinet. There is "disarray" indeed. So much so that "debate" becomes moot. For genuine political debate presupposes the possibility, even the inevitability, of action at the end of it. What the advocates of disarray/Democracy have to offer is paralysis.

But the most remarkable example of the *Times*'s campaigning under the guise of reporting was its inclusion of Henry Kissinger among the prominent Republicans and former statesmen who, in a story by Todd Purdum and Patrick Tyler headed "Top Republicans Break With Bush on Iraq Strategy," were supposed to be opposed to what was further supposed were President Bush's views on war with Iraq. The story was immediately picked up and repeated as the lead of the "NBC Nightly News." Nearly three weeks later, after it had been pointed out that no such sense could legitimately be derived from the op-ed article in *The Washington Post* that was said to be the source of this contention, the *Times* issued a grudging and half-hearted "correction" that essentially repeated the distortion it was said to be correcting.

Although the article "should have made a clearer distinction between [Kissinger's] views and those of Mr. Scowcroft and other Republicans with more categorical objections to a military attack," wrote the *Times*'s anonymous corrector, "Republicans are in fact divided"—as, indeed, they would be, seemingly, if poor Mr. Scowcroft were the only one to express any doubts. "Most centrally, Mr. Kissinger said that removing Mr. Hussein from power—Mr. Bush's justification for war—was not an appropriate goal. He said an attack on Iraq should be directed toward a more limited aim, eradicating weapons of mass destruction." In fact, not only did Kissinger not say this "most centrally," he did not say it at all. He said that "the objective of regime change should be subordinated in American declaratory policy to the need to eliminate weapons of mass destruction from Iraq as required by the UN resolutions"—not that it was inappropriate.

Interestingly, the *Times* had also had to apologize a few days before to the British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, for reporting that he had said in a BBC interview that "reinstating United Nations weapons inspectors—not the removal of Saddam Hussein—is the centerpiece of Britain's policy toward Iraq." The correction noted that "the assessment that removing Saddam Hussein is 'not an object of British foreign policy' was made by the BBC interviewer, not by Mr. Straw." Could it be that there was a pattern of inaccuracy in reporting the words of public officials, born of the fervent desire on the part of the *Times*'s editorial staff that as many of them as possible should be anti-war? Or at least anti-Bush.

What *was* central to Kissinger's article was the contention that, now that the "ambiguity" of the administration's attitude towards war with Iraq had brought it to "the point of inviting leaks concerning military planning, congressional debate and allied pressures"—he might have added "internal dissension"!—"the time has come to define a comprehensive policy for America and for the rest of the world." This, he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thought, was the more necessary because of the "revolutionary" nature of the President's challenge, in his speech at West Point last June, to "the international regimen" which has prevailed since the Treaty of Westphalia "based on the concept of an impermeable nation-state and a limited military technology which generally permitted a nation to run the risk of awaiting an unambiguous challenge."

This, he said, was no longer the case in a world threatened by stateless terrorist networks. Kissinger agreed with what he said was the President's belief that "the terrorist threat transcends the nation-state; it derives in large part from the transnational groups that, if they acquire weapons of mass destruction, could inflict catastrophic, even irretrievable, damage. That threat is compounded when these weapons are being built in direct violation of UN resolutions by a ruthless autocrat who sought to annex one of his neighbors and attacked another, with a demonstrated record of hostility toward America and the existing international system." You have to be a pretty determined ideologue to make those the words of someone who thinks "regime change" is "not an appropriate goal."

In any case, it was a goal that the *Times* corrector falsely put in opposition to the destruction of Iraq's terror weapons, since the one was clearly, both in Kissinger's article and in administration's policy, simply the means to the other. "The overthrow of the Iraq regime," wrote Kissinger, "and, at a minimum, the eradication of its weapons of mass destruction would have potentially beneficent political consequences, as well: the so-called Arab street may conclude that the negative consequences of jihad outweigh any potential benefits. It could encourage a new approach in Syria; strengthen moderate forces in Saudi Arabia; multiply pressures for a democratic evolution in Iran; demonstrate to the Palestinian Authority that America is serious about overcoming corrupt tyrannies; and bring about a better balance in oil policy within OPEC."

But Howell Raines, the fiercely partisan editor of the *Times*, thinks it is the conservatives accusing him of bias who are the ideologues, not he and his crack team of objective reporters. "The people who make those kinds of accusations, usually for ideological reasons, are the best witness on why they say that," he said on the PBS "NewsHour"—as if he still hadn't the inkling of a clue why such an egregious misrepresentation of the views of a former Secretary of State might give rise to the charge of bias. Ideology, in the terms used by this journalistic élite, is what their critics have, never themselves. It is a sort of superstition, I suppose. Like the Ugandan prophetess Alice Lakwena, Mr. Raines believes that, once his followers have been anointed with the magic butter of journalistic "professionalism," they become impermeable to the "ideological" bullets of the right.

Nor was it only the journalistic professionals of the *Times* who showed themselves far less hesitant than the administration when it came to flinging themselves into battle—in their case the battle against battle. Throughout July and August, it was not difficult to discern a six-pronged attack by the media on the prospective war. For weeks alleged news stories appeared purporting to show not only that (1) responsible Republicans like Brent Scowcroft, Dick Armey and, er, Henry Kissinger were against it, but also that (2) the people, especially ordinary Republicans, were against it. "A lifelong Republican, Tom Meaker worked on Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign in 1964, served as a Marine officer in Vietnam and now owns a small printing company. His vote helped George W. Bush carry Arizona in 2000," claimed a heart-tugging story by Michael Janofsky in the *Times*. "But ask Mr. Meaker about the Bush administration's not-so-veiled hints of plans to invade Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein, and party loyalty evaporates in the afternoon heat."

Also, (3) the allies were against it. Or, as the headline to a story by Elaine Sciolino in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the *Times* put it "As U.S. Pursues Verbal War on Iraq, the World Voices Concern." Expressed or implied in such stories was often the charge that, in ignoring these sagacious allies, Bush risked a return to the unilateralism that marred his pre-September 11 presidency. "Many foreign officials," wrote Glenn Kessler in *The Washington Post*, "believe the Bush administration, with its unyielding focus on the war on terrorism and the primacy of U.S. interests, increasingly places little stock in the needs and opinions of other nations."

Moreover, (4) war had not been discussed fully enough in Congress and the media—that "debate" again—and the President's case for war had not been made to either. Mr. Raines's successor on the *Times*'s editorial page wagged his finger at the President, saying that "it is time for Mr. Bush to level with the nation about his intentions and to talk candidly about why he feels military action against Iraq may soon be necessary, and what the goals, costs and potential consequences of a war would be." One can only imagine what the *Times*'s reaction to such candor would be: probably to point out, once again, that (5) war was a diversion from more important national goals, both at home and in the war on terrorism, and an attempt to seize the agenda from the Democrats in advance of the midterm elections: "Officers: Iraq Could Drain Terror War," claimed the *Post*. Likewise, "Several Republicans said today that the focus on Iraq would serve the political needs of their party going into the close Congressional elections," wrote Adam Nagourney in the *Times*. As a result, said Nagourney, Democrats were scurrying to appear more-patriotic-than-thou.

This charge, however, sorted very oddly with the final point of the anti-war case, which was (6) the inherent risks of the prospective military campaign itself. Michael Janofsky's appeal to the *vox populi* went out of its way to note that, though the President remained popular, "popularity comes with an asterisk that could portend huge political risks for an administration convinced that another military action against Iraq is necessary and worthwhile." But how do these "huge political risks" sort with Adam Nagourney's assumption elsewhere that war would be such a political sure thing that Bush must be supposed to be contemplating it not for the reasons stated but precisely to gain a political advantage? Not for the first time, we suspect that the *Times* is less concerned with making its critique of administration policy coherent than with finding any stick to beat the President with.

Besides the political risks, such as they might be, there were also the military risks (a Vietnam-like disaster, a quagmire awaited us, hinted Howell Raines in justifying his policy of questioning administration policy), the economic risks (the war would be costly and further increase the growing deficit), and the diplomatic risks (war would "destabilize" the region and incur the hostility of the whole Arab world). Anyone foolish enough to take the counsel of the media on the matter might suppose that the President must be a fool or a madman even to consider military action against Iraq, so much at a distance do they keep themselves from any arguments for the other side.

But then, the media is up to this contention too, or will be if Bush's popularity shows signs of slipping. Already Dana Milbank, late of the all-Gore, Al-the-time *New Republic* and now chief White House correspondent of *The Washington Post*, has referred to the chief executive of his country as "marionette-in-chief"—his strings being in the hands of that dangerous lunatic of a puppet-master, Bill Kristol. Well, folks, that's what passes for "debate"—*pace* Michael Kinsley—in the U.S.A., *anno domini* 2002. It looks a lot more like disarray to me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books

The chastened liberal

by Daniel J. Mahoney

The short twentieth century, beginning with the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo in July 1914 and culminating in the collapse of communist totalitarianism in the *annus mirabilis* 1989, is now behind us even if its intellectual substance has not been adequately digested by our intellectual and political elites. The end of the cold war and the implosion of European communism even led some to proclaim "the end of history" as if the hyperbolic wars and totalitarian regimes of the century were mere parentheses, a disturbing if temporary blip in the forward march of humanity. Today, commentators too often oscillate between pessimistic despair and progressivist complacency, between Spenglerian nightmares about "the clash of civilizations" and neo-Hegelian fantasies about "the end of History." What is needed instead is reliable judgment rooted in a balanced appreciation of the profound forces at work in the modern world. Among the best guides to understanding the short twentieth century is Raymond Aron (1905–1983), the great French political thinker, sociologist, and philosopher, who provided the surest commentaries on the events of the century even as they were unfolding. His writings combine meditative reflections on the contemporary world with astute commentaries on "history-in-the-making." He wrote authoritatively about politics and war, economics and political philosophy. His judgment was humane and sure-footed, rooted in common sense and in the best available information about the nature of modern societies. He effortlessly combined the modern social scientist's attention to particulars with the *phronesis* that Aristotle says is the hallmark of the true statesman. He was a realist without being a cynic and a (conservative) liberal who never succumbed to ideological abstractions.

One of Aron's great intellectual ambitions was to write a "history of the twentieth century" that would make sense of the contradictions that marked that century: the coexistence of hyperbolic wars and totalitarian states and ideologies with undoubted "progress" in the economic, scientific, and sometimes even the political realm. This book remained unfinished although it was undoubtedly present in a dispersed form in the over forty books as well as the thousands of articles and newspaper columns that Aron wrote between the 1930s and his death in the final years of the cold war. In 1996, the French publisher Plon released *Une Histoire du XXe Siècle*, a nearly-thousand-page annotated anthology of Aron's writings which illustrated the extent to which Aron had in fact succeeded in providing a comprehensive and authoritative history of the twentieth century. The writings in this valuable anthology were carefully selected by a group of distinguished scholars associated with the *Societé des Amis de Raymond Aron* including Christian Bachelier, Pierre Hassner, Jean-Claude Casanova, and Pierre Manent. *The*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dawn of Universal History[1] reproduces about forty percent of the original while still managing to convey the main lines of Aron's analysis of the twentieth century. Its major lacuna is the complete exclusion of the section entitled "French Problems." This is to be regretted since this extensive section in the original included Aron's commentaries on de Gaulle's efforts to "re-found" France and Aron's devastating dissection of the "common program" of the Left, so disastrously implemented by President Mitterrand between 1981 and 1983. The French "Union of the Left" attempted, in Aron's memorable phrase, to "square the circle" by combining massive nationalizations and state-enforced redistribution with efforts at establishing full employment and enhanced economic productivity. One suspects that the publisher does not believe that a contemporary American audience has much interest in European politics, even if the drama of French politics from the French Revolution until the establishment of the Fifth French Republic has been at the center of universal history. It is one more illustration of the growing gap between Europe and the United States and does nothing to heal "the transatlantic misunderstanding."

The book beautifully explores the decline of the European nation-state, the fall of colonial empires, and the rise of the two peripheral "continent-states," the United States and the Soviet Union. The second section of the book, "From Sarajevo to Hiroshima," provides the single best account of the "wars in chain reaction" that unfolded after 1914 and culminated in the "bellicose peace" which was the Cold War. Despite a reputation for "icy clarity" (the phrase is Mauriac's), Aron's writing in this section is infused with the dignified pathos of a humane liberal chronicling the self-destruction of bourgeois Europe. The old bourgeois order was overwhelmed by the "technical surprise" (the dominance of defensive warfare that contributed to the drawn out character of the First World War) and the subsequent rise of illiberal regimes of the Left and Right in Russia, Italy, and Germany in 1917, 1921, and 1933, respectively. Aron makes this history intelligible without succumbing to what he calls "the retrospective illusion of inevitability." He knows that "what has happened has happened and cannot not have been, but how easily it could have been otherwise!" Aron's balanced judgment about men and things is tied to a philosophy of history that attempts to account for both the profound necessities at work in the contemporary world (the tendency toward total war in an industrial age, the "organization of enthusiasm" and the nationalization of life that accompanies war in a democratic age) and the margins of liberty that are still available to citizens and statesmen. If the British and French had prevented the remilitarization of the Rhineland in 1936 or stood up to Hitler at the time of the Munich crisis in 1938, it is at least possible that the German military would have thwarted Hitler's insane imperial designs and spared Europe and the world a terrible catastrophe. And without Churchill, it is not clear that the British would have had the moral will to hold out alone against Hitler. Aron reminds us that the search for historical intelligibility must respect human liberty and not ignore the stakes and decisions as they were understood by the principal actors at the time.

I have called Aron a "conservative liberal," a perspective that infuses the remarkable writings on "The Secular Religions" in section three of this book. Aron believed that liberal rationalism must renew itself: it was no longer credible to affirm the progressivist identification of scientific with moral and political progress. Aron had little sympathy for the "myth of revolution" and did not hesitate to point out that the liberal democracies were the conservative powers and the totalitarian states the revolutionary ones. In

1 *The Dawn of Universal History: Selected Essays from a Witness of the Twentieth Century*, by Raymond Aron, translated by Barbara Bray; Basic Books, 520 pages, $35.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their struggle against the "secular religions," the democracies were defending not only the liberal and "formal" freedoms—the full range of political and economic liberties—but also the spiritual heritage of a civilization that predated enlightenment rationalism. This self-described unbeliever, this "de-Judaized Jew," knew that in the struggles with the pagan barbarism of Nazism and hyper-rationalist communist ideology, nothing less than liberal and Christian civilization were at stake. Pluralism and respect for the spiritual nature of man have sources richer and deeper than philosophical modernity. Aron eloquently highlights the "liberalism" at the heart of an older European civilization and the way that it was threatened by the ideological search for unanimity:

> Life in the West, with its distinctions between temporal and spiritual power, Pope and emperor, national church and Pope, nobility and bourgeoisie, is made up of tensions not so much overcome as managed, a process that calls for effort, struggle, and creativity. Soviet society aims at unanimity: It no longer permits rivalry between the temporal and spiritual powers, between social classes, or between the society and the state.

The dream for a society without conflicts is the greatest chimera—it attacks the principle of vitality and creativity at the heart of western civilization. Aron equally rejected the "pessimistic" reduction of human beings to beasts of prey by totalitarians of the Right and the violence and tyranny imposed in the name of Historical Reason. His magisterial 1944 essay on "The Future of Secular Religions," translated into English for the first time, is a moving dissection of totalitarian nihilism and a call for the reconstruction of a liberalism that can provide the masses with faith in freedom and the future of man. True liberals understand the human need for "devotion to a more than human task" while teaching us "to first respect the virtues of mere humanity." These wise words capture the grandeur and distinctiveness of Aronian liberalism.

In his otherwise competent (if somewhat uninspired) introduction to the book, the historian Tony Judt makes the egregious claim that while Aron was unabashedly anti-Soviet, he found "little to admire in its main competitor," the United States. This may be true of Tony Judt but it was not the case with the remarkably pro-American Aron. He knew that America was not a universal model in every respect, but he admired its liberty, its dynamism, and the myriad sacrifices Americans had made on behalf of European liberty. He had nothing but contempt for the academic "revisionists" who blamed the Cold War on the United States while displaying empathetic understanding for the security requirements of Stalinist Russia. Even Aron's criticisms of American involvement in Vietnam are presented with sympathy for the genuine dilemmas confronting America's leaders, and without the slightest trace of indulgence for America's totalitarian enemies. Aron respected "the Imperial Republic" even when he criticized it for its persistent oscillation between disengagement and a crusading spirit. Writing in 1972 about America's imperial role, he wryly notes: "the East Europeans acclaim the president of the United States: They are sorry that they, too, do not live in the sphere of influence and responsibility of 'imperialism.' Where are the countries in which Leonid Brezhnev would be acclaimed?" So much for Judt's tendentious suggestion of some fundamental Aronian distaste for American civilization. Judt also claims that Aron's "vigorous anti-communism" was "strikingly moderate." This is true if by "moderate" one means principled and unrelenting but never fanatical or doctrinaire. But Judt goes on to identify Aron's position with "George Kennan in later years" despite the fact that at the end of his life Aron was an unrelenting critic of the later Kennan's indulgence toward the Soviet Union and his unquestioning support for détente. Judt subtly removes the conservatism from Aron's conservative liberalism in an attempt to make him more palatable to the readers of *The New York Review of Books*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tony Judt is right, however, to note that Raymond Aron rejected the very idea of "the end of history" long before that concept became fashionable in the United States. He knew and respected Alexandre Kojève (alas, he never suspected him of being a Soviet spy) and was familiar with this idea decades before it was popularized by Francis Fukuyama. He knew that the modern world was undergoing a "mutation" of sorts, that science, industry, and democratic ideology were transforming the world in new and radically unprecedented ways. But he also appreciated what he called in the title essay "the durability of the traditional aspect of history—the rise and fall of empires, rivalry between regimes, and the beneficial or baleful exploits of great men." Aron prudently oscillated between a Thucydidean understanding of the permanence of human nature and power politics and a Kantian affirmation of the real steps toward democratic pacification in the contemporary liberal world. His determined effort to do justice to both the new features of modernity and the constancies of historical and political experience, and his ultimate refusal to succumb to either historical pessimism or optimism, make him a trustworthy guide to the momentous twentieth century. His voice is marked by clarity of language and thought, and his judgment by a humane regard for human liberty. This book is a must read for every opponent of totalitarianism and partisan of a chastened or mature liberalism.

The gypsy balladeer

Federico García Lorca Collected Poems, edited by Christopher Maurer. Farrar Straus & Giroux, 960 pages, $50

reviewed by Alexander Coleman

The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda was once asked which were the best and worst language vehicles for his poetry in translation. After pondering the matter, the poet opined that he preferred Italian, since it "comes closest (to my original Spanish), because by keeping the values of the words, the sound helps reflect the sense." English was deemed the worst for his purposes, "being so much more direct, [it] often expresses the meaning of my poetry but does not convey its atmosphere." Indeed, the poet added, "the accuracy of the translation itself, of the meaning, may be what destroys the poem." It should be noted that the French language did not fare well, either: "In many of the French translations . . . my poetry seems to me to vanish, nothing is left, yet one can't complain because they express what one has written." Translation is clearly a complex problem, best summarized by the impression that a whole range of poetic expression in Spanish has an emotional charge and a verbal power best realized by reading the poetry aloud, as most certainly is the case with both Neruda and Lorca—their verses take flight only with the spoken word, and their respective public triumphs were often in theaters, if not stadiums (as in Neruda's case). English poetic expression is far more muted, *pace* Dylan Thomas, more for the eye than the ear. One only has to compare and contrast any of the recordings made by Neruda and T. S. Eliot to hear the most convincing testimony on this matter.

The poetry of Federico García Lorca has offered similar challenges to a translator from Spanish to English over the years. It cannot be just happenstance that Ted Hughes, exasperated after the near-impossible task of translating García Lorca's stark tragedy *Bodas De Sangre* into *Blood Wedding*, pronounced in definitive fashion that "Lorca cannot be Englished." All the more compliments and salutations are therefore due to the eminent Lorca scholar Christopher Maurer for bringing out this year, some sixty-six years after the poet's gruesome assassination near his home in Granada, the first almost complete bilingual edition of the Lorca corpus, with many previously uncollected and unpublished poems translated here for the first time. The volume is "almost complete" due to the fact that the editor has thankfully given us only a brief selection

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from Lorca's first collection, *The Book of Poems*, the poet's lengthiest book and easily the worst, plain and simple. Indeed, it is difficult to glimpse the future in this mass of poetic mediocrity, but Lorca was soon to find his voice with *Poem of the Deep Song*, and after that, there was no stopping him—that is, until Franco's goons rounded him up along with every other local free-thinking university professor, liberal town councilor, the odd Mason and the local Homais, doctors, teachers, humble workers, and trade unionists. Before Lorca was shot in late August 1936, some 280 citizens had suffered the same fate in the same place.

Professor Maurer has given us a short literary history of Lorca's poetic development, and there are so many disparate elements synthesized therein that summary is well nigh impossible. Probably the surest way to start is by realizing that Lorca, a good pianist, came to literature from music—a hovering presence over all of Lorca's life is the saintly figure of Manuel de Falla, a mentor in every sense of the word. In 1922, just at the start of Lorca's meteoric career, the poet and the composer organized a one-time only Festival of Cante Jondo, more popularly known as "flamenco," where distinguished artists and instrumentalists were presented well away from smelly bars and dives—both poet and musician were arguing for the musical and poetic identity of Andalusia, a miniscule patch of land that reached out somehow to Bizet, Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov, Ravel, and Debussy. The festival transformed a provinciality into a universality—gypsies, bullfighters, singers emblematic of everyman are known throughout the world today through Lorca's poetic mythification.

In spite of the renown, ever since Bizet's *Carmen*, of a generalized Andalusian atmosphere, it is important to emphasize how intensely Lorca fought against the cheapest and most touristic kind of folklore. He was nothing if not at all-embracing poet, fusing the past (going right back to the metaphorical daring evident in the Muslim poets of the Caliphate) and on to a complete re-evaluation of traditional folk poetry, as dramatized by the epochal researches and recordings made by Ramón Menéndez Pidal. But just as he was a devourer and assimilator of Andalusia's past, and Granada's past in particular, he had a thirst for the future of literature—his friendships with Pablo Neruda and, above all, to Salvador Dalí were emblematic—each successive book of Lorca was a new beginning, a break with the most recent innovation. The aesthetic and qualitative distance between the *Book of Poems* and the *Poem of the Deep Song* is stunning, inexplicable. But as he moves through the twenties, each book, the *Suites*, the *Songs*, and the culminating *Romancero gitano* (Gypsy Ballads) are each exercises in condensation, metaphorical daring, imposition of mystery, and, above all, avoidance of the abstract within a constant contemplation of death. Lorca prided himself on his instinctive imagination, his anti-academic poetic prowess, even though his literary essays, above all those on Gongora, children's nursery songs, and imagination versus inspiration, are splendidly argued and carefully developed. He was a bear of a worker—dead at thirty-eight, he had written thirteen plays and nine books of verse, plus numerous other essays, interviews, and a rich varia.

Professor Maurer's splendid edition is all the more treasured because we can finally take the measure of the poet, now well away from the circumstances of his death and his inevitable transfiguration into *the* tragic symbol of the death of the Spanish republic. In many ways, his death prevented a close reading of his complete achievement, and his flamboyant personality often got in the way too. For instance, Jorge Luis Borges met Lorca in 1933 in Buenos Aires; it was not a happy encounter. In a not atypical burst of savagery, Borges recalled Lorca only by saying that "I suppose he had the good luck to be executed, no? He struck me as a kind of play actor, no? Living up to a certain role, I mean being a professional Andalusian." Borges, who by then was gradually transforming himself into an Eliotic, metaphysi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cal poet, was appalled by the very gay flair of the lionized poet, along with the increasingly vanguardistic daring of Lorca's work, evident above all in his *Poet in New York*, and he was pitiless in his estimation of Lorca, before and after his death.

Twelve translators have participated in this estimable effort, and in general I found the versions to be not only accurate but also attentive to the quality of the poem as a poem in English. The distance between Spanish poetic practice and the general tone of English poetry today demands a kind of associative and freely engaged reader. For a reader only familiar with Lorca's "greatest hits," many of the poems of the middle period have a Haiku-like intensity and economy that is not often associated with the Lorca of a more rhetorical thrust such as that typified by the *Gypsy Ballads* or *The Poet in New York*, the latter work finally published posthumously in 1940. Here is one of my favorites, a Haiku translated by Alan S. Trueblood from Lorca's *Songs, 1921–1924*:

Despedida (Leave-taking)

If I die,
leave the balcony open.
The boy is eating oranges.
(From my balcony I can see him.)
The reaper is reaping the wheat.
(From my balcony I can hear him.)
If I die,
leave the balcony open!

Big Ben

Edmund Sears Morgan
Benjamin Franklin.
Yale University Press, 368 pages, $24.95

reviewed by Marc Arkin

There is only one member of the Founding Generation who, even if he had never turned his hand to statecraft, would be known to posterity as more than a footnote to the kind of obscure work of local history that gathers dust on the shelves of county historical societies throughout the east. George Washington would be remembered as a promising Virginia aristocrat who surrendered his militia company to the French at Fort Dusquesne; Jefferson as a debt-ridden gentleman farmer with a taste for exotic vegetables, heterodox religious opinions, and conventional racial views; Adams a splenetic lawyer overshadowed by his more charismatic cousin Sam; Madison a shadowy dreamer. Only Benjamin Franklin was already famous by the time of the American Revolution, a man known for his accomplishments not only throughout the colonies, but in Europe as well. Franklin was a world celebrity at a time before such a thing was even dreamed of.

Benjamin Franklin crammed into his long life—he died in 1790 at the age of eighty-four—almost more activity than be comprehended. Starting out life as a printer, he edited one of Pennsylvania's most popular newspapers for many years; more famously, he founded, provided the copy for, and printed *Poor Richard's Almanac*, the best-selling reference work in colonial America. Poor Richard's sayings alone would have earned Franklin's place in American history.

In his spare time—even before he turned his printing business over to his partner so that he could devote himself to public life—Franklin became one of the foremost scientists of the eighteenth century, renowned for his pathbreaking experiments and scholarly papers on electricity and other natural phenomena; in recognition, he received honorary doctorates from a host of universities including Edinburgh and Oxford, membership in the Royal Society, and correspondent membership in virtually every other European learned society. In the process, he cultivated the friendship of kindred souls everywhere and hobnobbed with such intellectual giants as Joseph Priestley and David Hume.

Franklin's insatiable curiosity led him to inventions ranging from the lightning rod and the Franklin stove, the most efficient indoor heat source available during his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lifetime, to bifocal glasses. Characteristically, he refused to accept a patent on these devices, believing it wrong to make a profit on his discoveries. His studies of convection led him to design a more efficient street lamp and to develop a special knack for handling smoking chimneys—even Lord Kames sought Franklin's help with a troublesome flue in a letter that also sought advice on the diplomatic situation between England and her North American colonies. And, for good measure, Franklin is generally credited with the first American political cartoon, a dismembered snake, the segments labelled for the thirteen colonies, with the motto "Join, or Die," published in 1754.

Closer to his Philadelphia home, Franklin had a full career as a public citizen. He bore the laboring oar in founding Pennsylvania's voluntary militia during the French and Indian War—voluntary because the Quaker-dominated Assembly refused to fund even a defensive armed force—as well as the city's volunteer fire department and fire insurance company. In addition, Franklin led in the founding of the Library Company of Philadelphia, the prototype for all subscription lending libraries in the United States, the American Philosophical Society, an outgrowth of one of the intellectual clubs he had started, and the University of Pennsylvania—three institutions that exist to this day. And we haven't yet mentioned Franklin's heroic service to the American cause during the revolutionary years.

Until recently, despite his presence on the one-hundred-dollar bill, Franklin had not occupied a prominent place in the popular tradition. One explanation is that he was a generation older than the other Founders; he died just as this relative obscurity, however, seems about to change. In the last year, Franklin has been the subject of at least one lengthy biography—nominated for the Pulitzer Prize—and his massive collection of papers has been made available on CD-ROM, something that, doubtless, would have intrigued the old inventor. And, as the sine qua non of a rising star, this fall Franklin faces the prospect of a three-part PBS documentary. Wonderfully, we now also have a short study of Franklin's life by one of America's most eminent colonial historians, Edmund S. Morgan, Sterling Professor Emeritus of History at Yale and chairman of the editorial board of the Franklin Papers. At a time in which marginal personalities receive multi-volume biographies, it is a delight to read this elegant three-hundred page life of Franklin, a tribute to the biographer's art—almost lost—of drawing a portrait that permits the ordinary reader to grasp what was significant about the subject without retailing every morsel of what he ate for breakfast.

Almost thirty years ago, in his graduate seminar on colonial history, Professor Morgan counselled his students—of whom, in the interests of full disclosure, I was privileged to be one—to let the original sources speak for themselves. In this work, Morgan has done exactly that with all forty-six volumes and counting of the Franklin Papers; he permits Franklin largely to speak for himself, with a literary style that remains enviable to this day. The man that emerges is at turns warm, witty, remarkably clear-eyed, and always fascinating—sometimes, as Morgan perceptively remarks, for his unquestioned assumptions, such as a world with nothing but hand power, as much as for those things he foresaw, such as an American empire. Morgan's own approach to this wealth of material is deceptively spare; like Franklin, he wears his prodigious learning lightly. But, it is all there, and it grows with each rereading.

The core of the book, not surprisingly, rests in its description of Franklin's diplomatic activities on behalf of the colonies from 1757, when he first served as Pennsylvania's colonial agent in London, through his time in France where, in 1782, he negotiated the peace treaty that ended the war with England. Overall, Franklin lived in England for roughly eighteen years, and in France for another nine or so. Indeed, from 1757 to 1785, he seems to have lived on his native soil for no more than four years—arriving from a second diplomatic stay in England just in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time to be elected to the Second Continental Congress, to head Philadelphia's Committee for Public Safety, and to help write the Declaration of Independence, before being swept off to France.

Morgan's lucid account of the incompetence of the English ministries as they lurched from the Stamp Act of 1765 to the Intolerable Acts of 1774 makes for depressing reading; Franklin himself captured their utter blindness to colonial opinion in the title of his 1773 pamphlet *Rules by Which a Great Empire May Be Reduced to a Small One*, dedicated to Lord Hillsborough, British secretary for colonial affairs. Morgan also does much to recapture a lost perspective, a world of largely personal relationships lubricated by Franklin's charm, in which neither side expected the dispute over parliamentary power to tax and legislate for the colonies to end in war.

In fact, for those laypeople unacquainted with Morgan's earlier work on the Stamp Act crisis, it may come as a surprise to learn how long the colonists—even a patriot such as Franklin—continued to consider themselves not simply English, not simply part of the Empire, but subjects of the British Crown. As late as 1775, Franklin still hoped to work out a solution rather like today's Commonwealth, in which North America would be a self-governing part of the Empire allied to England through allegiance to the king.

This is not to say that Morgan ignores the private side of Franklin's life; no biographer worth his salt could resist some of the material Franklin provides. After all, it was Franklin, who, at twenty-four, entered a common-law union with the sweetheart he had abandoned in his teens because no one was quite sure whether her deadbeat husband was dead or alive, and then brought along his own year-old illegitimate son by another woman—whose identity he never revealed. What is more, the book is full of vintage Morgan aperçus. Take, for example, this contrast between Franklin and Jefferson. As Morgan observes, during the middle of the Revolution, Jefferson admonished the astronomer David Rittenhouse that he was squandering his time serving in the Pennsylvania legislature, proclaiming there is "an order of geniuses" above the obligation of public service—the "common drudgery of governing a single state"—and therefore exempt from it; this while Franklin was in France negotiating the alliance that secured American independence. Years earlier, during the less pressing circumstances of peacetime, Franklin had written a scientist friend, that it was exactly such talents that rendered public service imperative: "Had Newton been pilot but of a single common Ship, the finest of his Discoveries would scarce have excus'd, or atton'd for his abandoning the Helm one Hour in Time of Danger; how much less if she had carried the Fate of the Commonwealth." And Morgan offers a tonic alternative to the current inflation of John Adams's stock, much of it in Franklin's own wonderfully dry words. Having put up with Adams's officious intermeddling in the French treaty negotiations, Franklin summed up the man with what Morgan calls "the fairest and most quoted assessment anyone ever made of the character of John Adams: 'I am persuaded . . . that he means well for his Country, and is always an honest Man, often a Wise One, but sometimes and in some things, absolutely out of his senses.'"

If there is any weakness in the narrative, it is that Franklin emerges as almost too good to be true—always at the center of events, forebearing in the face of calumny, leading his recalcitrant countrymen "by a thread" to the greatness he foresaw for them while writing helpful advice on everything from the placement of lightning rods to the Gulf Stream. He is too charming, too wise, too good, too prescient altogether, except for a strange two-year interlude after his first diplomatic mission to England during which he misread the increasingly radical direction of colonial opinion. While in France, he alone manages the delicate business of maintaining the French alliance—with its critical financial support—in the face of congressional incompetence, competition

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from none-too-honest state agents, and the marginal sanity of the various commissioners sent to assist him, each of whom seems bent on alienating the good will of the French foreign minister and destroying the credit of the United States. Indeed, Morgan remarks that "It could be said that Franklin had been singlehandedly conducting negotiations for peace throughout the war." Only once does the reader catch a glimpse of another side of the story, when Franklin's fellow commissioner to the peace negotiations, John Jay, is credited with a "series of dangerous undercover maneuvers designed to extract better terms from the British by suggesting a willingness to desert the French"—but, only when Franklin fell ill with kidney stones.

Having said that, too much of a good thing is sometimes not enough. It may be trite, but there is a deep affinity underlying this book, Morgan's first in fifteen years. At eighty-five, Edmund Morgan is the dean of American colonial historians, yet his work remains very much on par with the writings of his youth, among which I count at least three biographies and several character studies. Morgan's broad humanism, gentle wit, and continuing curiosity all mirror those of his subject. As with Benjamin Franklin, we are unlikely to see his like again.

A brighter, clearer light

Marcel Reich-Ranicki,
The Author of Himself:
The Life of Marcel Reich-Ranicki,
translated by Barbara Bray. Princeton University Press, 404 pages, $35

reviewed by Tess Lewis

There is no American counterpart to Germany's critical impresario, Marcel Reich-Ranicki. Known, with a rather pointed admiration, as the "literature pope," Reich-Ranicki, or MRR, revitalized the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*'s book section in the 1970s during his fifteen-year tenure as literary editor. In 1988 he became a household name with his hour-long televised talk-show "Literarische Quartett" (Literary Quartet). Six times a year for thirteen years, he and three other critics discussed five books, usually contemporary works, but occasional classics as well. Against all odds and expectations, the show was a success, regularly drawing more than 700,000 viewers. Forefinger waving, MRR could make and break a book with a single word—most often his signature "Herrrrlich!" (wonnnderful!) or "Grössslich!" (horrrrible!).

Reich-Ranicki is best known for his terse, incisive, even pitiless judgments. He wrote that "[c]ourage and strength of character are not among the most conspicuous virtues of the esteemed writer Christa Wolf" in 1987, three years before she published *What Remains,* her only fiction explicitly critical of her government, a story she had waited a decade to publish—that is, until it was safe to do so—and five years before the extent of her association with the Stasi was revealed. After the fall of the Wall, MRR managed to salt her wound indirectly, inflicting new wounds on others, by pointing out that most of the East German writers then complaining about the ruthlessness of the Western publishing industry were braver than they were readable. Wolf, by implication, was one of the relatively more readable authors.

Although prone to enthusiasms, Reich-Ranicki is, to be sure, a demanding reader and his insistence on holding contemporary works up to the standards of the classics has enraged many a colleague and victim. One volume of his collected reviews is entitled *Lauter Verrisse* (Nothing but Drubbings). His attempt to counter his image as a "literary executioner" by publishing a collection entitled *Lauter Lobrede* (Nothing but Praise) had little effect. After his condemnation of Günter Grass's novel about German reunification, *Too Far Afield*, the weekly *Der Spiegel* put a photomontage on its cover showing MRR's head on a bulldog's body, ripping up the novel. Yet Grass's most

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

recent novella, the as-yet-untranslated *Crab Walk* (about the killing of almost 10,000 German nationals fleeing East Prussia and the Free City of Danzig in 1945, when the Soviets torpedoed the refugee ship "Wilhelm Gustloff") brought tears to MRR's eyes. And these tears, he announced on his new book-show "Reich-Ranicki Solo," are a sign of the novel's greatness.

Behind the theatrics, however, is an eloquent, thoughtful critic, prodigiously well read in German language literature, who, despite the loss of his family in the Holocaust and his experiences in the Warsaw ghetto, never lost his passion for that literature. That enduring love is the cornerstone of his autobiography, *The Author of Himself*. Completely assimilated and an atheist, Reich-Ranicki felt as much an outsider among Jews in his native Poland as in Berlin where he attended school from the age of nine to eighteen. German literature became his "portable fatherland." Reich-Ranicki's mixture of devotion to Germany's tolerant and enlightened high culture and defiance of those susceptible to the National Socialists' bastardization of it, not to mention defiance of anyone unwilling to take him seriously, accounts to a great extent for this young provincial Polish Jew's rise to the forefront of the postwar German literary establishment.

His rise was harrowing. Marcel Reich-Ranicki was born in 1920 in the town of Wloclawek to a lower-middle-class family. His father was a hapless businessman whose repeated failures caused his Germanophilic wife to send nine-year-old Marcel to live with relatives in Berlin. For his first few years at school, he was spared from overt anti-Semitism. After 1934, however, it had insinuated itself even into his outwardly tolerant school. In 1938, the Nazis deported him as an "alien Jew" to Warsaw. He survived by giving German lessons and, once he was confined in the ghetto, he became a translator for the Jewish Council. From this somewhat privileged position he was able to avoid deportation to Treblinka, though he was powerless to save his parents or his brother. Shortly before the final liquidation in 1943, Reich-Ranicki and his wife, Tosia, managed to slip out of the ghetto and bribe their way into hiding with a typesetter named Bolek and his family outside Warsaw. He and Tosia spent the last year of the war rolling thousands of handmade cigarettes a day to earn their keep. In 1944, as he was leaving Bolek's house, the typesetter implored him not to tell anyone he had hidden them, "I know this nation. They would never forgive us for sheltering two Jews."

Reich-Ranicki's account of the humiliations and horrors of life in the ghetto is all the more moving for its utterly dispassionate tone. It is also unflinching. He tells, for example, of making a pass at his future wife ten minutes after she had tried to cut the belt from which her father had hanged himself in their ghetto apartment and of MRR's lack of misgivings on moving into flats that had been abandoned by the previous owners in a great hurry. "Had the inhumanity we had witnessed made us inhuman too? Our compassion had certainly been dulled," he concludes.

A certain evasiveness enters his story when he relates his years after World War II. After the Soviet Army arrived, he worked as a censor for the military, which, unbeknownst to him, was under the direction of the Ministry of Public Security. The Ministry later sent him to London briefly in 1948 as a foreign intelligence officer, though without giving him any instructions. When a Soviet advisor required him to provide a training program for spies, Reich-Ranicki, at a loss, made one up from novels he had read. The advisor was delighted. MRR also mentions that he joined the Communist Party in 1945, believing he had finally found the refuge he desperately needed. Yet in the 1950s he realized this decision had been "a serious mistake." (He was in fact briefly imprisoned and expelled from the Party in 1948 for "ideological alienation.") Nonetheless, he diffidently mentions his reapplication to the Party in the early 1950s. He was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reinstated in 1957, though no one informed him at the time. Surely both of those situations were far more complex than he presents them here.

Although expelled from the Party, Reich-Ranicki was intermittently allowed to publish criticism and translations of German literature, and soon established himself as an authority. In 1958, with the re-Stalinization of Poland under Gomulka and a resurgence of anti-Semitism, MRR, his wife, and young son escaped from Warsaw to West Germany. Befriended by authors he had translated into Polish and more talented than many of the other critics at the time, Reich-Ranicki rapidly rose to prominence with weekly reviews for *Die Welt*.

His rise was rapid, but by no means easy. Reich-Ranicki's outspokenness and ruthless independence made him many enemies. He repeatedly expresses surprise in his autobiography that so many of his friendships foundered when he wrote negative reviews of good friends' works. But there were more sinister currents to navigate as well. In 1973, shortly after he was hired by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the publisher Wolf Jobst Siebert invited him to a party at which he "politely but energetically" insisted on introducing Reich-Ranicki and his wife to the guest of honor: Albert Speer.

Recently, one such current swelled into a tidal wave. In May, Frank Schirrmacher, the present publisher of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, printed an open letter in his paper in which he explained to Martin Walser his refusal to publish a first serial of the latter's novel *Death of a Critic*, claiming that Walser's thinly veiled caricature of Reich-Ranicki as the power-hungry telegenic critic André Ehrl-König was anti-Semitic. The book had not yet been published and the manuscript was closely guarded; the uproar was deafening. For a few weeks after it appeared, *Death of a Critic* dominated the German bestseller lists, just as MRR's autobiography had for most of 1999.

Although Walser has written intelligent and discerning essays on Auschwitz, he has also repeatedly provoked his countrymen with heavy-handed attacks on German taboos. In his 1998 Pauluskirche speech, Walser objected to the way foreigners have used Auschwitz as a "moral cudgel" against Germany to gain political and moral high ground. In the ensuing controversy, Reich-Ranicki even rose to Walser's defense. But Reich-Ranicki had eviscerated too many of Walser's more than forty books over the years. Walser's parody of MRR in *Death of a Critic* is heartless and tasteless. When Ehrl-König is missing and presumed dead, for example, his wife announces that he could not have been murdered because dying was not in his character. As both Reich-Ranicki and his wife saw their families destroyed and deported, this is hardly excusable. What truly galls in this affair is Walser's exploitation of anti-Semitic clichés for shock value and his insistence that this ad hominem attack is really just an exposure of critics' and the media's abuse of power.

One of MRR's missions has been to "continue, perhaps in a very demonstrative manner, the tradition of Jews in the history of German letters." (One of his books is entitled *Disturbers of the Peace: Jews in German Literature*.) In light of the Walser affair, this mission is obviously as important as ever. Another has been to spread his enthusiasm for books to as large an audience as possible without playing to the lowest common denominator. (His penchant for overstatement does, at times, lead him to play to the second lowest. He is fond of quoting Schiller's dictum, "The critic must exaggerate!") As one of the main spokesmen for Germany's historical and critical conscience, he has succeeded in both missions.

Reich-Ranicki's love of German literature saved his life on more than one occasion. Night after night in hiding, like Scheherazade, he related plots of novel and plays to Bolek, saving the most exciting for those times when his benefactor's patience and resolve were wearing thin. Later, when banned from writing in Poland, his translations from German literature were his only

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

means of support and finally his lifeline to the West. He has dedicated his life to serving that love.

It is a love that Germans, despite all the fame they have granted him, have returned ambivalently. (To be sure, MRR's arrogant, abrasive critical persona has engendered no small part of that ambivalence.) Nonetheless, his contributions to postwar German literature were amply recognized this summer with the Goethe Prize, one of Germany's most prestigious awards. "It is the highpoint of my life," Reich-Ranicki announced in his acceptance speech. "A brighter, clearer light can not fall upon me."

Profound perplexity

Isabelle Frank, editor The Theory of Decorative Art: An Anthology of European & American Writings, 1750–1940. Yale University Press, 424 pages, $22.50 (paper)

reviewed by Francis Morrone

"What are the decorative arts?" That is the first sentence of Isabelle Frank's introduction to her superb new anthology, *The Theory of Decorative Art*. In the "decorative arts" department at, for example, the Brooklyn Museum, one finds "period rooms" (including a re-creation of a seventeenth-century Dutch farmhouse), chairs, tables, beds, jars, dishes, pitchers, and sundry items of fine porcelain, glass, and silver. The period rooms, with their fine moldings, are indicative of the way most museums subsume all of architecture under the "decorative arts" heading. Indeed, as some of the essays in Frank's volume attest, locating the precise dividing line between architecture and decorative art is not possible. (What is the difference between an architectural detail and a decorative detail? Often one cannot say. Are the false I-beams on the façade of Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building an "architectural" or a "decorative" feature?) The Museum of Modern Art and others add "industrial design" and "product design" to the mix. Some of the authors in this book discuss clothing, jewelry, and tattoos as species of decorative art. It almost seems as though the field is so broad as to suggest there is no such field. And, as the essays in this book again attest, no theory of decorative art can even attempt to encompass all that we place under that heading.

This volume is an expertly selected and annotated collection of essays written between 1750 and 1940 on the characteristics and aesthetics of the decorative arts. The book presents many well-known writings, conveniently gathered together for the first time, as well as several lesser known essays, including some that David Britt has newly translated, from both French and German, for this volume.

This unequivocating passage, on England in the early eighteenth century, struck many readers of John Wain's wonderful biography of Samuel Johnson (published in 1974):

> It was a place in which ugliness was very rare; indeed, with the important exception of the ugliness that disease and disfigurement produce in human beings and animals, ugliness was unknown. This alone would make our England and Johnson's into two wholly different places. To us any object, from a city to a teaspoon, that is anything but hideous is immediately recognized as something special, probably the work of some world-famous artist. In his day there was probably no such thing as an ugly house, table, stool or chair in the whole kingdom. . . . [T]he main reason is known to all of us. It is that industrialism, by moving people away from the natural rhythms of hand and eye, and also from the materials which occur naturally in their region and to which they are attuned by habit and tradition, cannot help fostering ugliness at the same time as it fosters cheapness and convenience.

Wain wrote of a period at the outset of the timeframe Frank has selected for her anthology. This timeframe is apt. Before 1750 there was little overt theorizing about the decorative arts. There was, indeed, little

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sense of decorative arts as such: as Wain suggests, "habit and tradition," not theory, were important. By 1940, we had theorized the decorative arts well-nigh to oblivion. Therein lies a story, told here in the voices of its participants, from d'Alembert to Frank Lloyd Wright.

So, what *are* decorative arts? The pithiest answer is that which lies between fine art and non-art. (E. H. Gombrich calls it "unregarded art.") This is to say, a very great deal indeed. We are talking about anything from a teaspoon to a church fresco. The painter Pierce Rice makes the distinction between decoration and ornament. The latter he defines as pattern; the former as pictorial imagery. Rinceaux are ornament; a figure relief is decoration. I do not think Rice has any particular etymological standard for his distinction. It is useful nonetheless. A teaspoon is ornamental, not decorative. A church fresco is decorative, not ornamental. That is a workable distinction; pick different words if you want, with greater etymological resonance. The distinction helps us to make sense of this stew that lies between fine art and non-art. The stew exists in the first place because the Renaissance gave us the whole notion of fine art—painting, sculpture—as distinct from anything else that before then had been termed art. Nowadays, the decorative arts—and non-art—again dissolve into fine art, at least at the Whitney Biennial.

Frank divides her book into three broad sections, based on discernible approaches to the study of decorative art. The first section is on the function of decorative art, the second on the materials and techniques of decorative art, and the third on ornament. She rightly says that theorists have tended to focus on one of these three broad areas. In the first—and to me perhaps the most interesting—section, we find scintillating words from John Ruskin, so superb a describer and critic, and always worth reading and rereading, as here in his admirable adumbration of a hierarchy of function in the decorative arts. Frank packages Ruskin between two other great Englishmen, Pugin and Morris. Pugin was himself a decorator of enormous fecundity, indeed of genius, and his writings never measure up to his artistic practice. So do I feel it was the case with Morris. Their theorizing lent itself to inclusion by Pevsner among the sources of the Modern Movement. Here too are Semper and Riegl, and the sociologists Georg Simmel and Norbert Elias. Frank was very clever to include these latter two along with the art historians. In the second section, on materials and techniques, where much of the discussion revolves around the role of mechanization in decorative art, we again find Ruskin, the only writer to appear in all three of the book's sections. David Britt's new translations of Goethe, Adolf von Hildebrand, and Semper are reason enough to purchase the book. The final section, on ornament, contains the volume's more cockamamie offerings, including Adolf Loos's notorious essay "Ornament and Crime."

In section three we also find the Chicago architect Louis Sullivan, there being no one, I sometimes feel, who should have designed more and talked less. Sullivan is represented by an essay in which he seems to be calling for a moratorium on ornament in architecture, strange indeed from a man whose greatest contribution to architecture was as a designer of ornament. Sullivan's only competitor as an ornamentalist in the 1890s in America was Stanford White, who never wrote anything, and had no theorizing impulse, and who today seems the cleaner character for it. Not only did White not theorize but no one theorized on his behalf, so that one of the greatest flowerings of decorative art in the history of mankind, that which took place in America between 1880 and 1920, has no voice in this volume. These designers were anti-theoretical, having assimilated what Geoffrey Scott called the "canon of forms." This isn't quite what John Wain had in mind with his "habit and tradition," though, in fact, it is all about habit and tradition, transmitted through academies and ateliers, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

through the European apprenticeship system that produced master craftsmen and that immigrant artisans transplanted to America. While William Morris ranted and exhorted on behalf of handicraft, Italian carvers in New York, working anonymously and off the books, sometimes moonlighting from their jobs in the studios of the panjandrums of sculpture, created some of the most intricate, finely modeled, and delightful relief sculpture to be found on buildings anywhere at any time. Go look at the Apthorp, an apartment house on Broadway and 78th Street in New York, built in 1906–08. Look up at the four fully modeled, classically gowned female figures in limestone on the façade. They are exquisitely carved, at a level of craftsmanship that can stand with anything. These are decoration, not ornament. They delight us, and I cannot believe they did not delight their makers—whoever those makers might have been, for we do not know who they were. So these may not be fine art. Their expression is an untheoretical, bred-in-the-bone transmittal of the classical canon. Their allegory, if it exists, is murky. We best appreciate them as the pure forms they are. They are perfect decorative art, and they have no theory, need no theory—only the imprimatur of "habit and tradition," so crucial to the building of towns.

Frank herself suggests that an alternative organizing scheme for the anthology might have been: the English, the Germans, and the Modernists. The salient distinction among some of these theorists may not be to which aspect—function, materials, ornament—they speak, but in the tenor of their approach, and of their speech. The English tradition of writing on the decorative arts—and on the fine arts—markedly differs from the German. The English approach, even when it attempts to be theoretical, shines in its empirical, inductive, descriptive way of seeing the world. The Germans were more systematic, more truly theoretical, and, for the most part, were historicists; they were exemplars, as the English were not, of Geoffrey Scott's "biological fallacy"—notwithstanding which some of these Germans produced works of magisterial acuity, as for example did Wölfflin, well represented in this volume with a passage, written in 1886, on ornament. One wishes that Frank had violated her temporal schema to allow as a pendant to Wölfflin some passage from E. H. Gombrich's *Sense of Order*, probably the most important contribution since 1940 to the theory of ornament.

In Frank's volume I feel the absence not only of Gombrich but of Geoffrey Scott, whose *Architecture of Humanism*, in my view this century's most brilliant philosophical discussion of architecture, speaks directly to the issues raised by many of the writers in Frank's anthology. Scott wrote *The Architecture of Humanism* in 1914, so it falls well within Frank's temporal compass. If one argues that Scott's book is on architecture and not the decorative arts, just read him on Ruskin or Pugin, and one will see how apposite his words are to the discussion carried on in the essays in Frank's volume. This is a mere quibble, however. Frank's is a rich and extremely useful survey of thinking on the decorative arts, and everyone should own it. Yale University Press has made a handsome book, reproducing images where appropriate from the original texts. Frank ably annotates the essays, provides biographies of the contributors, and supplies a good bibliography and index. If in any way the book disappoints, it is because writers on the decorative arts over a two-hundred-year period tended to disappoint, not because Isabelle Frank disappoints, for she does not. Overall, we see among these writers—that is to say, among those who bothered to write on this subject at all—a deep unease about their subject, an underlying sense that decoration and ornament need to be justified within strict boundaries, as though left untempered they will devour the world. Who among these writers thinks Rococo decoration is just swell? The answer is none. There is also a pervading sense of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

decorative superiority of folk cultures or non-Western peoples.

In her introduction, Frank writes:

> By World War II, the theoretical debate about decorative art had in fact come to an end among Modernist designers and artists. Decorative art (or its equivalent denomination) had vanished from their vocabulary, replaced by such terms as industrial art, industrial design, or simply design, which clearly referred to a different type of artistic creation free of ornamental accretions.

The key, I think, is in what she says earlier:

> Although these attempts are fragmentary, many of them delve into the nature of artistic creativity and perception precisely in order to challenge the aesthetic canon developed by writers from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century.

Some of these writers, like Ruskin or Owen Jones, are hardly anti-ornamental. Nevertheless, they do exhibit the Romantic unease with the "aesthetic canon" of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Frank suggests that the desire to establish the arts of decoration on an independent footing—not subservient to the high arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture—fueled the challenge to Renaissance authority. Given that the decorative arts of the Renaissance were so splendid, I do not believe this challenge was necessary, but for purposes ultimately—as Geoffrey Scott wrote—extra-aesthetic.

Lacking as we do the sense of significant detail, and of the ordering patterns that "habit and tradition" and the "canon of forms" bequeathed to us, we toil today in a state of profound perplexity. Nowhere is this more apparent than in our debate over various proposals for a memorial at the World Trade Center site. We, as a culture, have no clue what to do. We are flummoxed. Some suggest that minimalism, à la Maya Lin, has become our new lingua franca of memorial making, as classical allegory and Scott's "canon of forms" were for earlier generations. Others suggest that minimalism is appropriate insofar as we wish to commemorate the morally ambiguous. But heroism? I submit we have theorized ourselves to lack confidence in the canon of forms, and it is just now that we may deeply regret allowing that to happen. This book is, among other things, an excellent starting point for understanding how it happened.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

Special section on anti-Americanism
with essays by Digby Anderson, John Derbyshire, Paul Hollander, Roger Kimball, David Pryce-Jones, and others
The fate of the Supreme Court *by Robert H. Bork*
"A mild and harmless relativism"? *by Scott Campbell*
The achievement of Max Beerbohm *by John Gross*
Is globalization a good thing? *by Tim Congdon*
Paul Valéry *by Joseph Epstein*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notebook

The apotheosis of Stephen Jay Gould

by Paul R. Gross

When, in May of 2002, Stephen Jay Gould died at age sixty, a torrent of eulogy issued from the presses. Gould was a paleontologist and a writer of popular science. Some readers who were neither consumers of popular science nor adepts of left politics were puzzled. Yes, his death was untimely; and he was a public figure. But so are other professors who are regularly in the public prints. Gould was not a politician, not a film star, not, despite his well-advertised baseball know-how, a sports figure. Biologists don't usually qualify for the industrial-strength obituary product. Somehow, this one, neither an Einstein nor a Ted Williams nor a lawmaker, did.

On the quality of Gould's thought, opinion among his peers was divided, negative predominant. John Maynard Smith, a principal among leading evolutionists, said famously that "Because of the excellence of his essays, he [Gould] has come to be seen by non-biologists as the preeminent evolutionary theorist. In contrast, the evolutionary biologists with whom I have discussed his work tend to see him as a man whose ideas are so confused as to be hardly worth bothering with." Although the public, at least in the United States, did see him as the top-gun evolutionist, the revisionist and rectifier of Darwinism, he was nothing of the sort.

An account of Stephen Gould's apotheosis must address two issues. First is the set of scientific ideas with which his name is associated (in no small measure via tireless self-advertising), and their reception among his scientific—not journalistic—peers. The second is Gould's politics, and its intertwining with his favored scientific themes, especially in popular exposition. Exposition there was! Spectacularly productive of words on paper, Gould's energy and élan as a writer, his historical erudition—always on display—were the envy of competitors, academic and journalistic. He was his own celebrant in the 300 monthly columns he wrote for *Natural History*. Repeatedly, book-length collections of them became best-sellers. Breathlessly, Phil Gasper, the eulogist in (appropriately) *International Socialist Review*, reports: "By the 1990s, Gould was a household name. In 1997, he made an animated guest appearance on "The Simpsons," and last year the Library of Congress named him one of America's eighty-three "living legends."

Here then is a synecdoche (a part standing for the whole: Gould loved to name this figure). This one stands for the reception of his science among investigators competent to judge it. It is an essay in *Human Nature Review*, by the evolutionary psychologist David Barash, on Gould's 2002 swan-song, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (TSET), 1433 pages. Barash explains: "The problem is that although I admired much in Gould's work—especially his persistence and panache—*and agreed with his politics*, I disputed, consistently, his science [emphasis added]."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Himself a skilled science writer, Barash cannot ignore the narcissism of TSET: "Such billowing clouds of verbal flatulence herald a new phenomenon—the literate bioterrorist—or maybe a biologically literate deconstructionist, more interested in generating complex clauses than in communicating anything." And, "It stands as a monument to good, professional editing . . . which it didn't receive. Gould—who famously refused to allow any modification of his unique prose—got his way at the end, and his book is the worse for it."

Barash's comments on Gould's scientific claims are not at all idiosyncratic, at least among evolutionary biologists:

> But what is TSET about? It is not about the structure of evolutionary theory. . . . It presents, instead, *the structure of Stephen Jay Gould's evolutionary theory*, which is a very different creature. Or species. Or more accurately, in the phrase once coined by maverick geneticist Richard Goldschmidt . . . a "hopeful monster." [emphasis in the original]
>
> Gould proclaims his monstrous book to be part of a Hegelian dialectic, in which traditional Darwinism (the Modern Synthesis) has become the thesis, with Gould's own ideas as antithesis, and a future synthesis waiting to be born. Quoting Ariel in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Gould looks ahead to a forthcoming "sea change, into something rich and strange." This something is never made clear, but whatever it is, it presumably involves "causative pluralism," "hierarchies of selection," and a lot of verbiage.

Hegelian—or Marxist—dialectics aside, to what do Gould's "causative pluralism" and "hierarchies of selection" refer? In plain words, to the claim that there are more things, e.g., species, on Earth than are dreamt of in natural selection, recombination, genetic drift, and so on—that is, in the Modern Synthesis of Darwin with genetics and the rest of biology. This was the wolf that for three decades Gould cried (as Daniel Dennett puts it). Gould yearned to be, and became known—outside the relevant scientific loci—as, Darwin's revolutionary redeemer. Unfortunately, all his proposals for what else is out there fell into three categories: caricatures of the Modern Synthesis; alternative accounts of evolution that were (are) already a part of the standard science and hence not in the least revolutionary; or sham inquiry, for political purposes. All were argued, however, in scientific and even more so in the popular writings, with brilliant style. The science was often presented in linkage to his political-cultural preoccupations: socialism and, latterly, a wistful, vaguely postmodernist anti-reductionism.

For example, caricatures: Gould, his sometime co-author Richard Lewontin, and followers refer regularly to "ultra-Darwinism," "pan-adaptationism," and "Darwinian fundamentalism." Those are slurs. They are meant to suggest that many scientists (the leading evolutionary biologists, in fact) are wedded to an obsolete and harmful system of reductive thought. According to such putatively obsolete thought, natural selection is the main agent of evolutionary change; the target of selection is the individual organism and the physical basis of its heredity, the genome; and, selected changes of biological form and function take place over many generations in the direction of better adaptation to the environment. The products of such thinking, Gould insisted, are often, or even generally, "just-so stories" à la Kipling, amusing fictions.

So far, however, that system of thought is the only coherent description and theory of what happens in evolution. The supporting evidence, including observed speciation events, is enormous. The body of adapationist evolutionary biology, which means essentially all of it, is nothing like just-so stories, although as in any succesful and expanding inquiry, they appear occasionally. The Modern Synthesis may some day be revised, perhaps greatly: science is change. But thus far it hasn't been; and Gould never offered a good reason why it is wrong, or a testable alternative. Instead, he rhapsodized

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on non-adaptive change, accidents of environment, and contingencies of embryonic development—all of which are well-recognized within the Modern Synthesis. In the last years he denied that he was rejecting natural selection. The creationists were not impressed.

Alternative accounts? In 1972, Niles Eldredge and S. J. Gould, paleontologists, published "Punctuated Equilibria: an Alternative to Phyletic Gradualism." By this they meant that macroevolution—effectively, speciation—does not happen slowly and continuously, but rather by abrupt large jumps separated by long periods of stasis. This was contrasted with Darwin's (supposedly) mistaken emphasis upon "gradualism"—evolution via the accumulation of small changes over time. Erected into theory, belabored, "punk-ek" became familiar in the business. Unfortunately, it is not a contrast or an alternative to the standard science. Darwin himself noted that rates of evolution are highly variable, although by the measure of human time-intervals, imperceptibly slow. Darwin's dwelling on "gradualism" had nothing to do with individual rates of evolution. It was an echo of the war between catastrophism and uniformitarianism. The latter was the flag of Darwin's mentor, the great geologist Charles Lyell, who refuted the geological catastrophism of natural theology (which explained, for example, the earth's physical features as due to Noah's Flood). Lyell assembled the evidence that the planet's main features had emerged over immense stretches of time—that is, "gradually." Neither Lyell nor Darwin denied catastrophes. As description, punk-ek was interesting; as a revolution in theory, well, it wasn't.

Among examples of sham inquiry were Gould's celebrated assaults on IQ. The opening broadside was his 1981 book, *The Mismeasure of Man*. Everywhere except in reviews by qualified psychologists it received frantic acclaim, and in due course a National Book Critics Circle award. Gould exorcised the psychometricians, who study the meaning and heritability of cognitive performance—intelligence—as measured in tests. Gould's late re-issue of *Mismeasure* had more demons from cognitive educational psychology, as used for example by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray in their widely denounced book *The Bell Curve*. Journalists and non-specialist critics, writing in lay journals, affixed the laurels to Gould's brow. Their relief was exquisite upon learning that there is no such thing as measurable intelligence. Experts, on the other hand, offered as usual mixed opinion, negative predominant. The neuropsychologist Steve Blinkhorn, the reviewer for *Nature*, yawned:

> With a glittering prose style and as honestly held a set of prejudices as you could hope to meet in a day's crusading, S. J. Gould presents his attempt at finding the fatal flaw in the theory and measurement of intelligence. Of course everyone knows there must be a fatal flaw, but so far reports of its discovery have been consistently premature.

Not much has changed since then, except that the correlation between IQ and learning performance (as in education) grows ever stronger. What has changed is that IQ testing, once seen as egalitarian (it gave poor kids with high scores a leg up), is now considered oppressive and racist. It is just not done. Nice people don't even *talk* about IQ.

Perhaps the most complete demolition of the 1981 *Mismeasure* arguments was by Bernard Davis, the Lehman Professor of Bacterial Physiology at Harvard and an honored geneticist. Anybody who cares about the meaning of "intelligence" and the extent to which it is heritable should read it, for it is as relevant to the later as to the original version. Davis exposed Gould's lengthy history of IQ as selective and tendentious. He identified the Marxist war cry "biological determinism" as the caricature it is, irrelevant to modern psychometrics and developmental psychology. In *Mismeasure* Gould claimed discovery of two scientific fallacies at the heart of intelligence-testing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One was "reification"—believing that a mere mental construct is a "thing." The other was factoring. There, borrowing earlier claims by others, Gould pronounced it statistically meaningless to calculate, from the correlation of results from tests of individual cognitive abilities, an underlying common factor—g, for general intelligence—and to use it in heritability research.

These "discoveries" left Gould's admirers gasping happily, but they are counterfeit. "Reification" is sound scientific practice. IQ and g need not be "things." IQ, or g, is a name for a set of processes in the brain that generate some important kinds of cognitive performance. Yes, that is a reductionist statement: but it is also true. No matter how complex the biochemistry, one result of it, organizational levels up, is thinking straight and solving problems. That is what IQ stands for; and it is now clear that IQ, and some aptitude and achievement tests, are the best single predictors of educational aptitude and performance. Multiple predictors are of course better. As to the claimed fallacy of factorization: Davis responded, starting with a quotation of Gould denouncing "Jensen's edifice":

> "The chimerical nature of g is the rotten core of [the educational psychologist Arthur R.] Jensen's edifice, and of the entire hereditarian school. . . . Spearman's g, and its claim that intelligence is a single, measurable entity, provided the only theoretical justification that hereditarian theories of IQ ever had." *This assertion is utterly false. Whether an IQ test measures general intelligence or mostly a collection of independent abilities, the heritability of whatever it measures will be precisely the same.* IQ's factor structure simply does not enter the equations for calculating its heritability. [Davis's emphasis]

No matter: there is a momentous postlude to Gould's attack. In June, 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court banned the execution of murderers with low IQ scores. And *The New York Times* approved! Clearly, it is now acceptable to believe that *low* IQ, at least, is a valid measure of general cognitive ability.

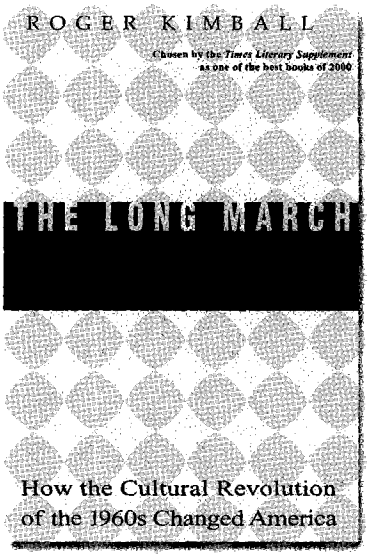
The thread that connects Gould's achievements should now be visible. It is, promoted with canny workmanship and dexterous writing, a visceral dislike of the idea that genes have something important to do with evolutionary outcomes. Gould rejects the notion of genes as the site of evolutionary acts. It is that hatred of "sociobiology," which uses the notion, that led Lewontin and Gould, and the Harvard-MIT left, in 1975, to their attempted scientific assassination of E. O. Wilson. The thrust of their maledictions—"Darwinian fundamentalism," "pan-adaptationism"—is against the path that evolutionary science has taken since 1960: molecular- and cellular-level verification of the Modern Synthesis. With that came increasing knowledge of the whole chain of processes, over levels of organization, that leads from the ions of cell membranes to the composition of symphonies; from silent sponges on the Pre-Cambrian seafloor to images beamed from space vehicles. That direction—only in a trivial sense a reductionist one—is a bête noire of academic Marxism. To leftish academics and to a majority of journalists today, that direction means "biological determinism," which means that we can never mitigate social and political horrors: it's all biology, the end of hope for change. But to sensible people, including most evolutionists, it means no such thing.

Every serious evolutionist is an interactionist, who recognizes that the phenotypic outcome, the living individual, is a product of heredity and environment coupled over life history. To people outside the field, Stephen Jay Gould was the answer: a uniquely articulate scientist who spoke for fairness and decency, who fought dangerous denizens of society such as creationists, racists, economic oppressors, and who defeated them with science. And that is how you get an animated guest appearance on "The Simpsons."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chosen as one of the BEST BOOKS OF 2000 by the *Times Literary Supplement*

An Intellectual Autopsy on the 60s


ROGER KIMBALL
Chosen by the Times Literary Supplement as one of the best books of 2000
THE LONG MARCH
How the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s Changed America

NOW IN PAPERBACK

The Long March

How the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s Changed America

by Roger Kimball

"I think it is terrific.... We haven't had a radical analysis like this—ever."

—WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR

ISBN: 1-893554-30-9
$16.95, 284 pages, paper

"The great contribution of Roger Kimball's important new book...will be to remind a generation of Americans...that their lives have been indelibly marked by....long since forgotten countercultural icons—and not for the better."

—*WEEKLY STANDARD*

"The '60s revolutionaries managed to normalize a spectrum of radical ideas, which now deeply affect the schools, the churches, the foundations, the professions, the art world and ordinary family life. Along the way, the radical nature of the revolution became invisible. Mr. Kimball clears away the underbrush of false history and shows what actually happened."

—*WALL STREET JOURNAL*

"The extent of the cultural revolution we have lived through since the Sixties is still not clear to us, nor is its meaning. Roger Kimball has produced a searching and comprehensive study that brings it all together, high and low, from Herbert Marcuse to Monica Lewinsky."

—HARVEY C. MANSFIELD

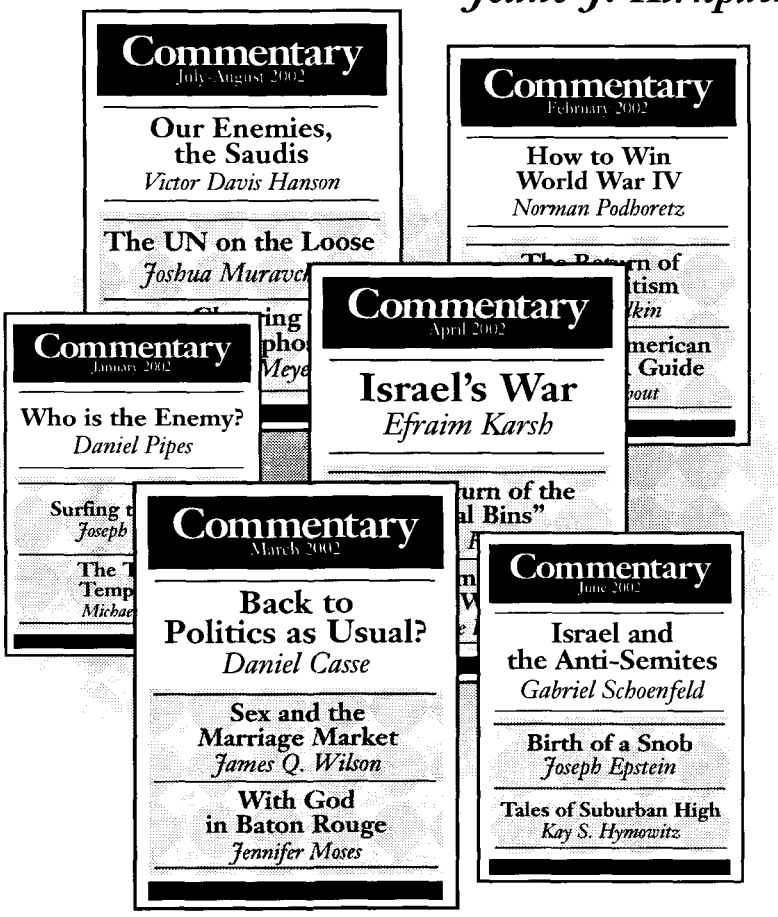
ENCOUNTER BOOKS
www.encounterbooks.com

AT BOOKSTORES EVERYWHERE OR CALL 800-786-3839

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Very, very important to the life of the United States, to the West, and, I am convinced, to freedom."

—*Jeane J. Kirkpatrick*



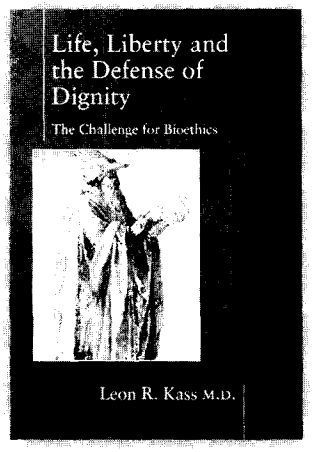
Commentary

Sound thinking for the 21st century.

$45.00 for 11 issues • Subscribe today! • $79.00 for 22 issues

Call 1 800 829-6270

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



ISBN 1-893554-55-4, $26.95, 300 pages

Life, Liberty and the Defense of Dignity

The Challenge for Bioethics

By Leon R. Kass

"That this book will, as it is intended to, stimulate intense discussion may be an understatement."

—Booklist

"In a time when many professional bioethicists have become sophisticated apologists for the scientific community or biotech industry, Leon Kass is one of the few who has kept a persistent focus on the central moral issues raised by technological change. A thinker with a marvelous ability to write, teach, and engage, this book is indispensible for understanding the past and future of the biotech revolution."

—Francis Fukuyama

In *Life, Liberty and the Defense of Dignity* Leon Kass summons us to think carefully about the new biomedical technologies threatening to take us back to the future. In a series of meditations on cloning, embryo research, the human genome, the sale of organs, and the assault on mortality itself, Dr. Kass, Chair of the President's Council on Bioethics, thinks deeply about the life and death issues we face today.

ENCOUNTER BOOKS www.encounterbooks.com

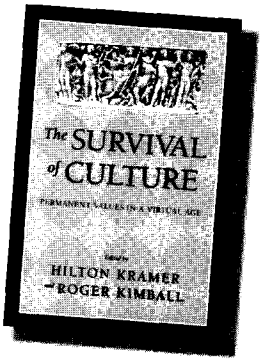
At bookstores everywhere or call 800-786-3839

A critical fever chart of our age

HILTON KRAMER AND ROGER KIMBALL, EDITORS

The Survival of Culture

Permanent Values in a Virtual Age



In these important and wide-ranging essays drawn from *The New Criterion*, ten distinguished critics reflect on the direction of our society, emphasizing the dangers that threaten our institutions as well as the vivifying survivals that are worth cherishing and nurturing. The contributors include Robert H. Bork, Anthony Daniels, Martin Greenberg, Roger Kimball, Kenneth Minogue, Eric Ormsby, David Pryce-Jones, Diana Schaub, Mark Steyn, and Keith Windschuttle. Vividly written, these reflections are guaranteed to spark controversy and debate.

Just published in hardcover and paperback

Ivan R. Dee, Publisher

www.ivanrdee.com

Chicago • A Member of the Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group

At your bookseller, or order toll-free 1-800-462-6420 with a major credit card.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

September 28 - October 26 **Catherine Drabkin**

November 2 - 30 **Langdon Quin**

December 3 - 28 **Seasons Greetings**
Holiday linoleum cuts by William and Marguerite Zorach

Marguerite Zorach: Lithographs

January 4 - February 1, 2003 **Kathryn Wall**

Andrée Ruellan
Works on paper from the 1920s and 1930s

February 8 - March 8 **Henry Finkelstein**

March 15 - April 12 **Ann Sperry: *My Piano***

Drawings by Sculptors
Dehner, Lachaise, Laurent, Nadelman, Storrs, Zorach others

April 26 - May 23 **Following Tradition: Contemporary Art in Needlework**
Xenobia Bailey, Amy Berk and Judith Flaxman

KRAUSHAAR
GALLERIES INC.

724 Fifth Avenue New York NY 10019 212.307.5730

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Reading Allowed

Horace, The Odes

New Translations by Contemporary Poets
Edited by J. D. McClatchy

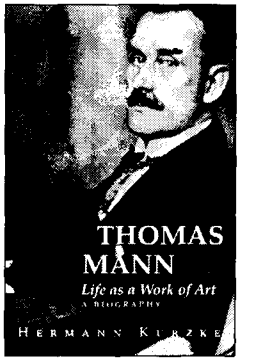
The odes of Horace are the cornerstone of lyric poetry in the Western world. Now for the first time, leading poets from America, England, and Ireland have collaborated to bring all 103 odes into English in a series of new translations that dazzle as poems while also illuminating the imagination of one of literary history's towering figures.

Facing Pages Series
Cloth $24.95 ISBN 0-691-04919-X

Thomas Mann

Life as a Work of Art: A Biography
Hermann Kurzke

Translated by Leslie Willson



This vivid literary biography brings to life the extraordinary talent and complex person who was Thomas Mann.

"A monument of good sense and sensitivity.... A humane account of a human being, vulnerable, obsessive, not overly likeable, and driven by an extraordinary talent."—T. J. Reed, *Times Literary Supplement*

Cloth $35.00 ISBN 0-691-07069-5

New in paperback

Lectures on Shakespeare

W. H. Auden

Edited by Arthur Kirsch

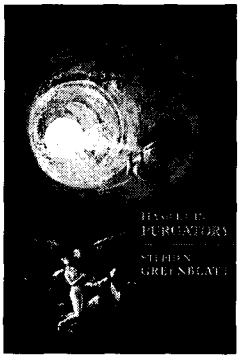
"A ... full account of what the poet said about Shakespeare but also about many other matters.... A remarkable achievement."
—Frank Kermode, *London Review of Books*

W. H. Auden: Critical Editions
Paper $16.95
0-691-10282-1
Due November

New in paperback

Hamlet in Purgatory

Stephen Greenblatt



"[Greenblatt's] writing here is poised, precise ... eloquent.... An exemplary work of historically informed literary interpretation."
—Robert Alter, *New York Times Book Review*

Winner of the 2002 Erasmus Institute Book Prize
Paper $18.95
ISBN 0-691-10257-0
Due October

Princeton University Press
800-777-4726 • WWW.PUP.PRINCETON.EDU

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kitagawa Utamaro
(1753 - 1806)
Renowned Beauties Likened to the Six Immortal Poets: Takashima Ohisa, ca. 1795
ōban tate-e 38 by 25.3 cm

SCHOLTEN
Japanese
ART

63 East 66th Street
New York
New York 10021

telephone
212.585.0474

fax
212.585.0475

email
info@scholten-japanese-art.com

web
www.scholten-japanese-art.com

The New Criterion
850 Seventh Avenue
Suite 400
New York NY 10019

Periodicals Postage
Paid at New York, NY
and at additional
Mailing Offices

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED